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We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

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RACIAL VIOLENCE IN THE SOUTH DURING WORLD WAR II

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

James Albert Burran, III

December 1977

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the scope, intensity, and complexity of the interracial violence in the ex-Confederate states from 1940 through 1946. Employing a survey and analysis approach, with the major peaks of violence during May 1943-August 1944 and August 1945-September 1946 as the most significant periods, this work will demonstrate that blacks in the South underwent a generally oppressive, not uplifting, experience during the war. While northern blacks and northern-based civil rights groups seemed to utilize the war era as a springboard for the "Second Reconstruction," most of the positive changes in fact emanated from political, economic, and military necessity rather than any great humanitarian impulse.

Three forms of violence--lynchings, civilian riots, and military-related conflicts--confirm and illustrate the overall thesis. From 1940 through the spring of 1943 both lynching and military violence escalated in direct response to the exigencies of war, black attempts to break down the color line, and white attempts to preserve it. During mid-1943 major civilian riots erupted in Mobile and Beaumont, together with an alarming rise in mutinies by black soldiers in southern camps and bases. From then to the end of the war mutinies and lynchings continued, but with the end of the conflict came a resurgence of violence as the nation reconverted to a peacetime footing. Riots in Columbia, Tennessee, and Athens, Alabama, along with a serious increase in lynching, showed white reaction to wartime gains for blacks and a general fear of the changes returning black veterans might bring. In the end, blacks remained in as separate

and unequal a society in 1946 as they had in 1940 below the Mason-Dixon Line. Thus, the wartime experience for southern blacks proved to be different from that of their counterparts elsewhere.

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CHAPTER I

"THE PROBLEM OF THE COLOR-LINE"

"The problem of the twentieth century," W. E. B. DuBois observed at the fin de siècle, "is the problem of the color-line." Having lived through the trials, accomplishments, and shattered dreams of black people in the United States since the Civil War, DuBois' perception of what the future held was based both on keen observation and his training as a historian and sociologist. His words proved prophetic.[1]

Throughout American history the problem of race relations and the role of ethnic and racial minorities has been a major historical theme. Conflict between minority groups and the majority has often produced racial violence, and in the twentieth century racial discord was especially visible during the two world wars and the 1960s. In each of these periods, as in others, violence often reflected an attempt by blacks to break out of the racial caste system and, during the wars, a corresponding white desire to maintain the racial status quo. Indeed, American race relations in general have had as a major characteristic black desire to end discrimination and segregation and a white desire to preserve them.

Conflict over whether World War II could change the status of blacks produced racial violence from 1940 through 1946. Black aspirations to destroy the color line during a period of widespread change and gradual improvement, and white fears that blacks were threatening a major upheaval

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[1] W. E. B. DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk, in Three Negro Classics (New York, 1965), 221.

in a time of national crisis, resulted in one of the worst concentrations of violence in this century. Southern racial disorder was a major theme during the war, for the six civilian riots, over twenty military riots and mutinies, and forty to seventy-five lynchings not only hampered seriously the region's contribution to the war effort but also showed the extent to which southern whites would go to preserve the color line. The southern black experience was different from the northern one during the war because of the white South's rigid adherence to racial separation.

The history of racial violence in the South dated back to the origins of slavery in the seventeenth century. Since the region maintained a system of African slavery for 250 years, that institution formed a major part of southern society and its vestiges lingered into twentieth century life. In a sense, the earliest form of racial violence, slave revolts, had much in common with the urban protest riots of the 1960s. Both showed black desires to escape either literal or figurative bondage, and the often swift white reaction. While North American slave uprisings did not occur as frequently as Caribbean or Latin American outbreaks, the Stono Rebellion of 1739, the Gabriel Prosser insurrection of 1800, and the Nat Turner revolt of 1831 resulted in consternation among whites that often bordered on paranoia. These three rebellions, along with at least a dozen others, illustrated some slaves' willingness to rebel openly against their oppressors even in the face of almost insurmountable odds. As Eugene Genovese has observed, "the significance of the slave revolts in the United States lies neither in their frequency nor in their extent, but in their very

existence as the ultimate manifestation of class war under the most unfavorable conditions."[2]

Following the Civil War and the abolition of slavery, collective racial violence transformed from the slave revolt to the race riot. Since freedmen now posed a distinct threat to white hegemony, the postwar riots saw whites attack blacks and their property, especially during periods of change or transition. Actually, the first known race riot occurred in 1831 in Providence, Rhode Island, when white sailors assaulted black residents. The largest riot in American history in terms of the number of lives lost erupted in New York City in 1863. Between 105 and 120 blacks lost their lives in this "draft riot" which exhibited racial connotations. Because of new and unwelcome adjustments and the attendant friction that the free blacks created in the South, a rash of riots by southern whites against blacks occurred during Reconstruction. Riots in Memphis and New Orleans in 1866, Vicksburg in 1874, and Hamburg, South Carolina, in 1876, among others, showed whites forcing blacks into a new southern system of race relations. At the turn of the century the Wilmington, North Carolina, riot of 1898 and the September 1906 Atlanta riot resulted from turmoil that accompanied the Populist and Progressive movements, the white reaction to Reconstruction's elevation of blacks to citizenship, and the rise of legalized segregation. In both cases whites forced blacks out of political

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[2]Eugene D. Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York, 1974), 588. For a recent discussion of American slave revolts and slave resistance, see ibid., 587-660; Peter H. Wood, Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion (New York, 1974), 308-26.

and economic power as the color line once again solidified. These riots served as violent confirmation of DuBois' observation.[3]

Though slave revolts and race riots seemed more spectacular, lynching also reflected strained race relations. Like whippings and other forms of slave punishment, lynching was a symbol of domination and authority meant to keep blacks in their "place." As with slave revolts and riots, lynching began early in American history. The meaning of the term has varied over the years; it involved both blacks and whites and occurred throughout the United States until around 1920 when it essentially became a southern phenomenon. No accurate count of the number of lynchings exists, but in the peak years, 1889 to 1930, some 3,724 people died at the hands of lynch mobs. Increasingly, southern blacks became the victims. Though lynching declined after 1930, this form of racial violence plagued the nation from colonial days through World War II.[4]

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[3]Irving J. Bartlett, "The Free Negro in Providence, Rhode Island," Negro History Bulletin, 14 (December 1950), 51-54, 66-67; Adrian Cook, The Armies of the Streets: The New York City Draft Riots of 1863 (Lexington, 1974); Allen W. Trelease, White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction (New York, 1971); Vernon Lane Wharton, The Negro in Mississippi, 1865-1890 (Chapel Hill, 1947); Carl N. Degler, The Other South: Southern Dissenters in the Nineteenth Century (New York, 1974); Charles Crowe, "Racial Violence and Social Reform: Origins of the Atlanta Riot of 1906," Journal of Negro History, 53 (July 1968), 234-56; idem, "Racial Massacre in Atlanta, September 22, 1906," ibid., 54 (April 1969), 150-73; Arthur I. Waskow, From Race Riot to Sit-In: 1919 and the 1960s (Garden City, 1966).

[4]James Elbert Cutler, Lynch-Law: An Investigation into the History of Lynching in the United States (New York, 1969 [1905]); Arthur F. Raper, The Tragedy of Lynching (Chapel Hill, 1933). The term "lynching" originally referred to physical harassment, such as tarring and feathering or whipping, but after the Civil War the term came to be closely associated with mistreatment of blacks by whites that usually resulted in death for the victims. The word also carried the connotation of death by hanging, but this was never the exclusive method. The general public increasingly accepted the myth that lynching occurred in interracial rape cases, but in fact less than one-fourth of the people lynched between 1889 and 1930 had been accused of that crime.

Racial violence involving military personnel also had pre-1900 precedents, and though such violence usually occurred during periods of war, there were exceptions. Perhaps the earliest military mutiny involving black soldiers occurred in Louisiana in 1863 among the men of the Corps d'Afrique. Although the blacks killed no one, they reacted violently when a white officer whipped a black soldier. As a result a court-martial convicted ten men and the white officer was discharged. During the late nineteenth century, violence by black troops against real or perceived mistreatment occurred at San Angelo, Texas; Sturgis City, Dakota Territory; Suggs, Wyoming; Walla Walla, Washington; and Winnemucca, Nevada. Similar incidents broke out during the Spanish-American War, most notably in Florida. These incidents contained general characteristics that were reflected in later military violence. In some minor cases chronic troublemakers, bored with military routine, caused violence. In others ill-feeling between two units gradually built to the breaking point. Because the uniform represented the right to enjoy the freedom exhibited by white troops, blacks often reacted violently when local white citizens tried to implement or enforce segregation against them.

In the early twentieth century riots erupted at Brownsville, Texas, in 1906, and in Houston in 1917. Recent scholarship indicates that the black soldiers stationed in Brownsville did not cause the violence. In the Houston riot, however, black soldiers, following weeks of intimidation, revolted against the local system of discrimination. In both cases local whites considered the troops guilty. President Theodore Roosevelt summarily dismissed the Brownsville defendents from the service, while the War Department convicted the Houston insurgents through highly prejudicial

courts-martial. Such treatment helped destroy black military morale, and other incidents that did not develop into riots met with similar white response. These characteristics surfaced again in World War II when military violence occurred on a much larger scale.[5]

During both world wars, lynchings, riots, and military violence occurred simultaneously. Even though lynchings and riots took place in large numbers during the First World War, the only full-scale military riot came in Houston. During World War II, in contrast, military violence constituted a large part of the overall discord, and most of it occurred in the South, reflecting causal patterns common to earlier incidents. From 1940 through 1942 the stationing of large numbers of black troops in the South, many of them northerners unaccustomed to a rigid color line, and black soldiers' insistence on being given the dignity they thought the uniform carried prompted violent reactions by whites who saw these servicemen as threats to racial harmony. From 1943 through 1944, however, blacks began to mutiny against oppressive conditions, in part because of the belief that if they were willing to give their lives for the country, they should be entitled to fair and impartial treatment. Southern whites, in turn, saw in this attitude a threat to the color line. The War Department, supporting segregation as a matter of expediency, remained

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[5]The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, 127 vols., series I, vol. 26, pt. 1 (Washington, 1889), 456-79; U. S., Congress, Senate, Message from the President of the United States Transmitting a Report from the Secretary of War Together with Several Documents, Including a Letter of General Nettleton, and Memoranda as to Precedents for the Summary Discharge or Mustering Out of Regiments or Companies, S. Doc. 402, 60th Cong., 1st sess.; Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., Black Americans and the White Man's Burden, 1898-1903 (Urbana, 1975); John D. Weaver, The Brownsville Raid (New York, 1973); Robert V. Haynes, A Night of Violence: The Houston Riot of 1917 (Baton Rouge, 1976).

insensitive to these problems and intervened only when conditions forced it to do so.

Through the lynchings, riots, and military violence of World War II, DuBois' assertion that the problem of the century was the problem of the color line held true, especially in the South. In reiterating the situation Gordon B. Hancock, a southern black scholar, stated in 1944 that "there is no way to avoid a head-on collision with the color question. It has been raised by the white man who dominates the Twentieth Century world." At the same time DuBois' contemporary and fellow sociologist, Charles S. Johnson, articulated the situation and sharpened its focus on World War II by observing that total war "is a cataclysmic national event that shakes and loosens many traditions from their deep moorings, whether these traditions are economic, religious, racial or romantic." The imperatives of war, he continued, "cannot trace a careful path around the embedded orthodoxies of race any more than can a flood or earthquake." When racial traditions have been disrupted and the familiar patterns of life altered, "a sense of insecurity is inevitable. The race problem in such situations becomes more personal, and in becoming more personal it becomes more emotional." Johnson saw that the unpredictable changes of World War II clarified issues so that normally sensitive problems took on vastly more important connotations; race relations rated as a most critical issue. Blacks became more reluctant to accept second class citizenship while fighting to preserve the "Four Freedoms," while most whites were unable to contemplate the possibility of any fundamental change in race relations. In the South, where almost 80 percent of the nation's

blacks lived, the racial conflict became a central issue.[6]

During the war, when familiar institutions were threatened by forces beyond the South's control, insecurity developed into a potent force that pervaded every aspect of life. As in the Reconstruction era seventy years before, the white South became monolithic in the face of uncertainty. Wilbur Cash in The Mind of the South suggested how whites, threatened by changes in race relations, reacted to create a "savage ideal"--a state of mind "whereunder dissent and variety are completely suppressed and men become, in all their attitudes, professions, and actions, virtual replicas of one another." An endangering of sensitive southern assumptions, beliefs, and values in turn produced an "incalculably sensitive and fierce determination engendered in the South not to be coerced or destroyed in any essential part of its being." This attitude, of course, muted the voices of the small core of southern white and black liberals, representatives of what Carl Degler recognized as "the other South."[7]

During World War II, the enduring conflict between whites and blacks over the color line emerged once again. The white South's dogged insistence upon racial segregation confronted black demands for radical changes and created conditions under which violent response from both sides proved inevitable. In the end the black minority lost, but it was an empty

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[6]Gordon B. Hancock, "Race Relations in the United States: A Summary," in What the Negro Wants, ed. Rayford W. Logan (Chapel Hill, 1944), 217; Charles S. Johnson, "The Present Status of Race Relations in the South," Social Forces, 23 (October 1944), 27, 30.

[7]Wilbur J. Cash, The Mind of the South (New York, 1941), 93-94, 140; Degler, The Other South.

victory for the white South. It could no longer forestall the resurrection of fundamental rights that blacks had technically gained seventy years before.

This study will probe the scope, intensity, complexity, and impact of the interracial violence in the ex-Confederate states from 1940 through 1946, while an examination of disorder in other periods and outside the South will be made to provide the larger context. As the result of the clash between two powerful forces, blacks in the region underwent an experience that proved as oppressive in some ways as it was uplifting in others. While northern blacks and northern-based civil rights groups utilized the war years as a springboard for the "Second Reconstruction," many of the positive changes emanated not so much from their efforts as from political, economic, and military imperatives. Nationwide there appeared a renewal of assertiveness among blacks and a corresponding attempt to portray the war as a struggle for victory at home as well as victory abroad. The "Double V" slogan epitomized this feeling, and it became more obvious to blacks as the war progressed that a fundamental paradox existed as had existed in World War I. While the nation as a whole professed to be fighting for the Four Freedoms just as it had fought a "War to Save Democracy" in 1917-18, in neither case had those lofty ideals been applied to blacks. It seemed that freedom and democracy in a real sense were for whites only. In the South militant blacks, northern soldiers stationed there, and northern-based organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) brought what they considered the irony and hypocrisy of the war effort home to many black citizens. Increasingly, they became aware of this

contradictory situation, and efforts to gain victory at home through political and economic achievements grew more intense as the war progressed. At the same time statements reflecting these contradictions pointed out black perceptions. One soldier requested that when he died in battle his epitaph should read, "here lies a black man killed fighting a yellow man for the glory of a white man."[8]

Most southern whites could not see the logic in black assertions that the war represented for them an inescapable irony. No communication existed between the two groups on this problem. For example, whites considered black assertiveness and the Double V slogan antithetical to the war effort. For blacks the war effort was hypocritical; such sentiments seemed incomprehensible to whites. The mayor of Eufaula, Alabama, conveyed this confusion in a letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, complaining that "since the outbreak of the present war, the Negro has adopted a policy of his own, being so bold as to state in some instances that 'when the war is over, the Negroes will take over the South.'" He believed that such attitudes, if left unchecked, would disrupt the war effort. Similarly, the commissioner of public safety in Birmingham, Eugene "Bull" Connor, saw danger in black expressions of militance. "It is not right or democratic that negroes, who compose about ten per cent of our population, shape the policy of the Southern states," Connor grumbled. "In these perilous times, the most patriotic part of America should be allowed to live its own way of life."[9]

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[8]Harvard Sitkoff, "Racial Militancy and Interracial Violence in the Second World War," Journal of American History, 58 (December 1971), 666-67.

[9]M. M. Moultrop to Eleanor Roosevelt, July 21, 1942; Statement by Eugene Connor, September 1, 1942, in "Monthly Mopac Area Reports: Labor

Such differing perceptions of the role of blacks in southern wartime society reflected the same lack of communication and understanding that characterized earlier periods. Historical traditions, the color line, and the exigencies of war brought about widespread racial violence that climaxed in mid-1943 as the intensity of black assertiveness and white reaction peaked. From then through the end of the conflict, violence compelled blacks in the South to abandon direct forms of militance and retreat into rigidly segregated, alienated subsocieties. When the war ended, more violence resulted from the tension inherent in reconverting from a war to a peacetime society. The ultimate irony manifested itself as whites, who generally proved either directly or indirectly responsible for the wartime racial violence in the South, placed the blame for violence on blacks.

The South in 1940 was a region wracked by depression. The South of 1946 had achieved considerable economic recovery, and along the way blacks had, in small ways, shared in that recovery. Yet most of the 7.4 million blacks in 1946 had attained but small economic or political gains. The Supreme Court in Smith v. Allwright (1944) outlawed the white primary, but other forms of discrimination against blacks at the polls continued.[10]

Mobilization and Utilization, Negro Recruitment," Series 11, Central Files and Monthly Mopac Area Reports, Records of the War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211, National Archives (hereafter cited as WMC Records, RG 211). The records of the WMC for Region VII, which includes most of the South, are housed in the Federal Archives and Records Center in East Point, Georgia. The National Archives prefers that material from its collections be documented by folder heading rather than by box number.

[10] Smith v. Allwright, 321 U. S. 649 (1944). This decision, rendered on April 3, struck down the white primary in Texas.

Black soldiers, perhaps the most militant segment of the race, remained in second class positions despite symbolic gestures during the war. Black southerners simply could not overcome the savage ideal despite increased racial awareness; the NAACP's rolls, for example, increased from 50,500 in 1940 to 450,000 in 1946, much of the increase coming from the South.

At the beginning of the conflict many blacks advocated equal employment opportunities through the unprecedented March on Washington Movement of 1941, though this remained largely a northern-based effort. Southern blacks also wanted equal opportunity as they sought to realize the Four Freedoms, but they gradually became more pessimistic in the face of escalating violence such as the Fort Bragg incident of mid-1941, the Alexandria, Louisiana, riot of early 1942, and three deaths by lynching within one week in Mississippi during late 1942. Southern black soldiers, influenced by their northern black counterparts stationed with them in southern camps, in some cases sparked the violence by merely representing a threat to the status quo. In the Mobile and Beaumont riots and continuing military-related incidents across the South during 1943 and 1944, the white backlash proved so forceful that blacks began to recoil. This development held true in the North as well, but in the 1943 Harlem riot northern blacks demonstrated their impatience by using retaliatory violence against the most accessible symbols of oppression, white-owned property in and around the ghetto.

By the end of the war further violence had forced blacks in the South to abandon direct forms of militance, and such incidents as the Columbia, Tennessee, riot of 1946 served notice that since the crisis had passed, the situation was going to return to "normal." Separate and

unequal black communities continued, and the region's black people, intimidated by a number of lynchings in 1946, returned to an uneasy coexistence with whites or left the region altogether. In general the savage ideal prevailed. But within ten years more far-reaching changes would emanate from the federal government, signaling the beginning of the Second Reconstruction.

The justification for a study of racial violence in the South during World War II rests not only on its importance as a significant theme in American history but also on an assessment of the existing scholarly work in a variety of areas: sociological and historical studies of violence, the recent "information explosion" in Afro-American history, and volumes done in recent American and southern history dealing with the war. None of this writing has dealt explicitly with racial violence in the South. While the disorder of World War I and the "Red Summer" of 1919 has stirred academic interest, the violence of World War II and afterward has generated comparatively little historical research.

Much of the published material on wartime violence came from contemporary writers who were concerned about the obvious rise of violence and sought to educate and enlighten the public. Invariably such writing reached a narrow readership. It does, however, provide worthwhile points of departure. The most influential of the contemporary volumes, Gunnar Myrdal's massive An American Dilemma, examined a variety of subjects pertaining to southern race relations such as lynching and "racial etiquette." Other authors whose work took the South under examination included John

Temple Graves, Charles S. Johnson, and Howard W. Odum.[11] In some instances contemporary authors studied specific incidents of racial violence to heighten public awareness of interracial problems.[12]

Interest in race relations remained limited, however, until the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s brought the problem into clearer focus. Sociologists effectively probed racial theory, racial oppression, and violence. In addition to Myrdal's classic and the theoretical work of such people as Robert E. Park and John Dollard, other literature dealing to some extent with southern racial disorders and violence in general appeared during the 1960s. Several of these volumes combined theory with historical examples to provide interdisciplinary anthologies.[13]

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[11]Gunnar Myrdal, with the assistance of Richard Sterner and Arnold Rose, An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy (New York, 1944); John Temple Graves, The Fighting South (New York, 1943); Charles S. Johnson, To Stem This Tide: A Survey of Racial Tension Areas in the United States (New York, 1969 [1943]); Howard W. Odum, Race and Rumors of Race: Challenge to an American Crisis (Chapel Hill, 1943).

[12]See, for example, Alfred McClung Lee and Norman Daymond Humphrey, Race Riot (New York, 1943); Harold Orlansky, The Harlem Riot: A Study in Mass Frustration, Social Analysis Report No. 1 (New York, 1943), copy in collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison; Terror in Tennessee (New York, 1946), copy in "Press Releases--Columbia Tenn. Riot," General Office File (GOF), Papers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Library of Congress (hereafter cited as NAACP Papers). This collection was being reprocessed in 1976. To cite old box numbers, which in many cases referred to sets of four to eight containers, would therefore be inappropriate. Instead, the separate folder headings (i.e.: "Lynching--1940") and general series (i.e.: "General Office File or abbreviation "GOF"), will be used.

[13]Robert E. Park, Race and Culture (Glencoe, 1950); John Dollard, Caste and Class in a Southern Town (Garden City, 1957 [1937]); see also Allen D. Grimshaw, ed., Racial Violence in the United States (Chicago, 1969); James F. Short, Jr., and Marvin E. Wolfgang, eds., Collective Violence (Chicago, 1972); Robert M. Fogelson, Violence as Protest: A Study of Riots and Ghettos (Garden City, 1971); National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, Report of the National Advisory Commission

Historians of violence began studies at about the same time as the sociologists, but the amount of worthwhile historical literature on the subject is neither as vast nor as comprehensive by comparison. Preeminent among the historians in this field, Richard Maxwell Brown has focused on colonial and frontier violence. Other authors who have written general studies of violence have in most cases ignored or minimized both southern conflict and World War II disorder, preferring instead to cover more sensational outbreaks in northern and midwestern cities. Some exceptions, however, exist. Robert V. Haynes dealt with southern discord in A Night of Violence, which examined the Houston riot of 1917. His insights, especially in dealing with military-related racial violence, are indispensable. On the subject of World War II conflict, Harvard Sitkoff's "Racial Militancy and Interracial Violence in the Second World War" stands as the single most important study of that topic. His discussion of southern conflict, however, was minimal.[14]

With the Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954 and the subsequent civil rights legislation and reaction of the next fifteen years, interest among historians in Afro-American affairs increased. In the field of black history, part of the interest focused on World War II. A few

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on Civil Disorders (Washington, 1968); Hugh Davis Graham and Ted Robert Gurr, eds., Violence in America: Historical and Comparative Perspectives (New York, 1969).

[14]Richard Maxwell Brown, Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism (New York, 1975); Haynes, A Night of Violence; Sitkoff, "Racial Militancy," 661-81; in addition, see Waskow, From Race Riot to Sit-In; Elliott Rudwick, Race Riot at East St. Louis, July 2, 1917 (Carbondale, 1964); William M. Tuttle, Jr., Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919; Richard Hofstadter and Michael Wallace, eds., American Violence: A Documentary History (New York, 1970).

important volumes appeared during the 1950s, but the next decade witnessed the publication of many valuable studies, some of which dealt at least briefly with southern violence. In 1966, as part of the Army's official history of World War II, Ulysses Lee's The Employment of Negro Troops was published and continues as the single most valuable source on blacks in the military during the war. It contained a limited discussion of southern military discord. Three years later Richard Dalfiume brought out Desegregation of the U. S. Armed Forces, broader in scope than Lee's book yet less detailed. In both this study and in an earlier article, Dalfiume provided worthwhile but brief descriptions of southern interracial conflict.[15]

Historians in the 1970s continued research in World War II era black history, finally producing two book-length examinations of the subject. In 1976 Neil A. Wynn, a British scholar, published The Afro-American in the Second World War. It stands among the two or three most significant works on wartime black history, but its discussion of southern violence is lacking. One year later A. Russell Buchanan brought out Black Americans in World War II. It provides interesting conclusions in a variety of areas, and takes a topical, semi-biographical approach.[16]

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[15]Louis Ruchames, Race, Jobs, and 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, 1959); Ulysses Lee, The Employment of Negro Troops (Washington, 1966); Richard M. Dalfiume, Desegregation of the U. S. Armed Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts, 1939-1953 (Columbia, 1969); idem, "The 'Forgotten Years' of the Negro Revolution," Journal of American History, 55 (June 1968), 90-106.

[16]Neil A. Wynn, The Afro-American and the Second World War (London, 1976); A. Russell Buchanan, Black Americans in World War II (Santa Barbara, 1977); other recent works on World War II black history include Allan M. Winkler, "The Philadelphia Transit Strike of 1944," Journal of American History, 59 (June 1972), 73-89; Lee Finkle, "The Conservative Aims of

General writing on World War II and southern history has not effectively developed the strain of violence. Recent overall studies, including Richard Polenberg's War and Society and George B. Tindall's The Emergence of the New South, have presented balanced yet limited accounts of interracial conflict in the South during the war. Earlier contemporary volumes, rather than the recent ones, remain the best sources on the subject from these categories.[17]

World War II provided the South with another opportunity to reassert its violent tradition. From 1940 through 1946 "the problem of the color-line" re-emerged in violent fashion, and once again the conflict between what whites wanted to preserve and what blacks sought to achieve became a central issue. This issue was one that linked the Old South to the New, for throughout the region's history the effort to keep blacks on the bottom, to limit their lives, and the simultaneous fight for racial dignity and equal treatment, provided a continual theme for the South and for Afro-Americans. The story of racial violence in the South during World War II was part of that theme.

Militant Rhetoric: Black Protest During World War II," ibid., 60 (December 1973), 692-713; idem, Forum for Protest: The Black Press During World War II (Rutherford Heights, 1975); Mary Penick Motley, ed., The Invisible Soldier: The Experience of the Black Soldier, World War II (Detroit, 1975).

[17]Richard Polenberg, War and Society: The United States, 1941-1945 (Philadelphia, 1972); George Brown Tindall, The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945 (Baton Rouge, 1967); see also John Morton Blum, V was for Victory: Politics and American Culture During World War II (New York, 1976); Sheldon Hackney, "Southern Violence," American Historical Review, 74 (February 1969), 906-25.

CHAPTER II

CLOUDS OF WAR

The United States in 1940 was a nation at a crossroads. After a decade of depression, the clouds of war promised renewed prosperity even as they augured death and destruction. A glimpse of what was to come had occurred in 1939 when, at the behest of the War Department, President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the short-lived War Resources Board. A host of alphabet agencies followed in 1940 and 1941. If "Dr. New Deal" was being replaced by "Dr. Win-the-War" during these months, he apparently had inherited the same penchant for creating a maze of overlapping authorities. Reacting to the German invasion of France in mid-1940, Congress quickly passed the National Defense Act, providing tangible evidence of the United States' intent to gear up for possible entry into World War II. By 1941 the signs of American involvement were unmistakable despite Roosevelt's reassurances that no American blood would be shed on foreign soil.[1]

These beginnings would ultimately grow to the largest and most successful war mobilization in the nation's history. For example, the federal government's outlay for physical expansion within the borders of the forty-eight states alone eventually amounted to an unheard of $74 billion, a third of which went into new manufacturing facilities. In addition, $11 billion was spent for military facilities such as forts, posts, and cantonments,

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[1]Polenberg, War and Society, 6-7; Frederick L. Deming and Weldon A. Stein, Disposal of Southern War Plants, National Planning Association, Committee of the South, Reports, No. 2 (Washington [1949]), 12.

and another $10 billion was converted into non-farm housing. The remainder went for expansion of industrial services, petroleum extraction, highways, agriculture, and a variety of other areas.[2]

If this elephantine growth proved beneficial for millions of Americans, it was a godsend to southerners. The South had been termed "the Nation's No. 1 economic problem" for good reason. In many economic sectors it had not shared the prosperity of the 1920s and as late as 1939 was still shrouded by depression. While the region possessed almost 41 percent of the nation's farm land, its farmers received only 21.5 percent of the total gross agricultural income. And while Dixie contained 15.3 percent of the country's industrial workers, they took home a modest 10 percent of the industrial wages. No matter how the figures were computed, the South was in the doldrums on the eve of World War II.[3]

If life was hard for white southerners, it was even worse for the 8.2 of the nation's 12.8 million blacks who still lived in the eleven ex-Confederate states.[4] Blacks had historically been discriminated against in virtually every aspect of life. Of the southern black population, only about 34 percent were urban dwellers and this meant that for a large number of blacks sharecropping continued as a way of life. An accurate rule of thumb was (and is) that the black rate of unemployment usually ran twice that of whites, a problem the South was unable and perhaps unwilling to confront.[5]

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[2]Deming and Stein, Southern War Plants, 1.

[3]Ralph C. Hon, "The South in a War Economy," Southern Economic Journal, 8 (January 1942), 292.

[4]Jessie Parkhurst Guzman, ed., Negro Year Book: A Review of Events Affecting Negro Life, 1941-1946 (Tuskegee, 1947), 1-2.

[5]Ibid., 7.

Since the South possessed few of the nation's heavy industries, initial war contracts did not greatly affect it. In addition, of the $74 billion spent in the states during the war for physical expansion, the South was the recipient of only about $10 billion; of this, half went for the construction and refurbishing of military facilities. Most of the remainder was spent on explosives and ammunition, chemicals and energy, and shipbuilding. Thus, the South received comparatively little (12 percent) of the wartime expenditures for physical expansion, and of the total, half was spent on areas that did not return major benefits in peacetime. In the meantime, the largest single area of southern expansion, military camps, was 36 percent of the national total expended. This brought a huge influx of federal money, partially offsetting the lack of industrial expansion. When Selective Service got underway in October 1940 the South quickly became the campground, if not the arsenal, of democracy.[6]

Overall, the value of southern production rose from 12.7 percent to 14.4 percent of the nation's total during the war, representing an increase in the number of manufacturing plants from 26,516 to 42,739. If this was in part a temporary development, it was nonetheless better economic progress than the South had seen since the Civil War.[7]

Increasing industrialization meant changes in southern demography. During the first three years of the war the region lost 3.4 percent of its

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[6]Deming and Stein, Southern War Plants, 11, 17; Rudolph Heberle, The Impact of the War on Population Redistribution in the South, Papers of the Institute of Research and Training in the Social Sciences, No. 7 (Nashville, 1945), 5.

[7]Tindall, Emergence of the New South, 700-1.

population, yet its urban areas grew markedly. Savannah, for example, increased 28.9 percent, Charleston 37.5 percent, and Mobile by an astonishing 60.9 percent by late 1943. It proved a major disruption for a people "always accustomed to the quasi-nomadic migrations of share croppers and mill workers."[8]

These wartime problems were not confined to the South, but because it traditionally had been the most conservative region in the nation, such sweeping changes had perhaps a greater impact on southerners. Of all the alterations wrought by the war buildup, none was as potentially dangerous as the pressure placed on the delicate system of southern race relations.

Gearing up for war meant the possibility of employment, and for depression-wracked black Americans this boded a brighter future. For black southerners it meant even more, for while the North had not proven to be the mecca many blacks had dreamed of, the South was even less inviting. Decades of explicit and implicit segregation and discrimination had forced southern blacks into a caste system that was virtually impossible to escape. Furthermore, the South of the 1930s had been a land of unremitting hardship. The Scottsboro case was a well publicized example of southern injustice, but the discriminatory measures of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration and the continued abuses in sharecropping arrangements indicated that the South remained hostile toward blacks.

For blacks in the South, the clouds of war fostered feelings both of hope and cynicism--though the cynicism usually remained repressed. They

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[8]Heberle, Impact of the War, 5, 14; U. S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "Estimated Civilian Population of the United States, by Counties: November 1, 1943," Population--Special Reports, Series P-44, No. 3 (Washington, 1944), 3-5.

remembered not only the hardships of depression but what many of them regarded as betrayal after the First World War. Most black Americans had gone into that conflict with high morale, "generated by the belief that the democratic slogans literally meant what they said." But the "close ranks" admonition of W. E. B. DuBois had seemingly produced no more than the "Red Summer" of 1919, when riots erupted in several cities in reaction to what whites perceived as a dangerous attempt by blacks to disrupt the racial caste system.[9]

By 1940 blacks knew better, especially southern blacks. They lived in a segregated world prescribed for them by the white power structure. While northern-based civil rights groups began to assert themselves, southern blacks generally adopted a passive optimism. This did not mean that they failed to support such groups as the NAACP, but they had carefully to hide their feelings. While racial militancy escalated after 1940, little of it was directly traceable to the South.

The Pittsburgh Courier's drive in mid-1940 to integrate the national defense program proved one of the best examples of increased hope and cynicism as the clouds of war approached. The Courier, an important black newspaper, recognized the need for prompt action to keep black morale from plummeting into despair, so it sponsored the "Committee on Participation of Negroes in the National Defense Program." Headed by Rayford W. Logan of Howard University, the Courier group appeared in May before a subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Appropriations which was considering the 1941 military budget.

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[9]Dalfiume, "Forgotten Years," 92.

Logan asked the committee for amendments to the budget, requiring among other things that the armed forces contain 10 percent black servicemen, a figure derived from the overall percentage of blacks in the American population. In addition, he requested that all branches of the service be fully integrated. Citing the favorable record of black servicemen in past wars, Logan alluded to the potential domestic racial problems if something were not done. "At a time when President Roosevelt is urging again, in almost the same language as did Woodrow Wilson, that we preserve democracy in the world," he warned, "the United States must not marshal her military forces in such a way as to discriminate against some of the most loyal and efficient soldiers of this country."[10] That same day a statement from Charles H. Houston, World War I veteran and noted black attorney, set an even more ominous tone. "The morale of Negro citizens regarding national defense is probably at the lowest ebb in the history of this country," he cautioned. Blacks had no faith in the leadership of the military, he added, a fact that the nation's black press made painfully clear. Houston concluded on a stern note by telling the senators that the government "cannot expect Negroes to be valiant defenders in time of war when it ignores and insults them in time of peace."[11]

Logan's committee accomplished nothing beyond the addition of an amendment to the appropriations bill that reiterated existing anti-discrimination directives. Change in the armed forces policies would come

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[10] U. S., Congress, Senate, Committee on Appropriations, Hearings before the Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, United States Senate, on H. R. 9209: A Bill Making Appropriations for the Military Establishment for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1941, and for Other Purposes, 76th Cong., 3d sess., 374.

[11] Ibid., 372.

only when the manpower shortage grew so acute that there was no other recourse.

Because 1940 was an election year, the Roosevelt-led Democrats needed to woo northern black voters, who had supported him in previous campaigns in response to New Deal social and economic policies. The white-led southern Democrats, however, did not permit blacks to vote in significant numbers. On October 25, 1940, as a sop to the Courier and black leadership in general, Roosevelt appointed William H. Hastie civilian aide to the Secretary of War and Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., as the first black brigadier general in the United States Army. Later, other blacks would be appointed to similar positions with impressive sounding titles but which carried little actual responsibility.[12]

In the meantime the March on Washington Movement (MOWM) took shape to contest discrimination against blacks in defense industries. Generally regarded as the single most militant action by black leaders during the entire war period, the MOWM forced Roosevelt to create the Fair Employment Practice Committee (FEPC). Where the Courier group failed (at least temporarily) to gain significant advancement for blacks in the military, the MOWM succeeded (at least temporarily) on the civilian front. The movement had been conceived by the militant black labor leader A. Philip Randolph, who saw it as a technique to force the administration to give blacks an equal oppotunity to participate in upholding the Four Freedoms through employment in defense industries. In a January 1941 letter to the Courier,

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[12] V. O. Key, Jr., Southern Politics in State and Nation (New York, 1949), 619-43; Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, 79-80; Wilma Dykeman and James Stokely, Seeds of Southern Change: The Life of Will Alexander (Chicago, 1962), 256-58.

Randolph complained that "Negroes are not getting anywhere with National Defense. The whole National Defense setup reeks and stinks with race prejudice, hatred, and discrimination." To show the nation that blacks would not be shoved aside, Randolph called for a march on Washington by 10,000 blacks.[13]

The Courier, even though it had sponsored a committee to lobby Congress to integrate the armed forces and bring in 10 percent black servicemen, dismissed Randolph's scheme as a "crackpot proposal" which was in effect a nuisance "organized by publicity hounds, job-hunters and addlepates." The Courier remained the only major black newspaper to oppose Randolph's plan.[14]

The march never took place because of a last-minute meeting at the White House, resulting on June 25 in Executive Order 8802. This order created the President's Committee on Fair Employment Practices, designed to prevent employers with federal defense contracts from discriminating against minority groups in hiring practices. In theory it looked good, but in fact the FEPC had few teeth with which to bite offenders. During its turbulent five-year life, the committee was bandied around Washington like an illegitimate child--no one wanted it.[15]

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[13]Pittsburgh Courier, January 25, 1941.

[14]Ibid., June 14, 1941; Finkle, Forum for Protest, 123. Finkle suggests that the main reason the Courier opposed the MOWM was because of personal enmity toward Randolph and his socialistic views by the newspaper's editor, P. L. Prattis.

[15]U. S., President's Committee on Fair Employment Practice, First Report, July 1943-December 1944 (Washington, 1945), 104-5; Garfinkel, When Negroes March, 7; Ruchames, Race, Jobs, and Politics, 140.

Historians since World War II have cited the March on Washington Movement and to a lesser extent the Courier committee and other smaller-scale actions as proof that militancy visibly increased among black Americans.[16] While militancy no doubt increased, neither the MOWM nor the Courier committee had solid grassroots backing. That Randolph was perfectly willing to call off a demonstration that had been at least a year in the making indicates that he could not guarantee a 10,000 person gathering. Fortunately, blacks who backed the MOWM did not have to show up at the Capitol to prove their support. The many claims made for the march proved in part unjustified.

Support of these early efforts at black advancement in the prewar months remained perceptibly quiet in the South. In fact, southern blacks responded to almost everything in whispers. The southern black press, along with the scattered southern branches of civil rights organizations, had not become forceful. Whites did most of the responding in that region, as they had for decades.

The NAACP, which in 1940 counted a modest 50,556 members in 355 branches, usually concentrated on legal problems and anti-lynching bills. At that time the association had no real positive program concerning the defense effort so it occupied itself in sympathizing with the MOWM and the Courier committee. With some exceptions, it remained inactive until after the nation entered the war.[17]

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[16] See, for example, Herbert Garfinkel, When Negroes March.

[17] Dalfiume, "Forgotten Years," 99-100; Finkle, Forum for Protest, 139-40.

The National Urban League proved even more lethargic than the NAACP. The NUL was from the beginning primarily a northern-based concern and in 1940 counted only seven affiliates in the ex-Confederate states out of a nationwide total of 45.[18] Both the Urban League and the somewhat more militant NAACP experienced severe financial problems, and during the depression neither could afford sweeping reform movements. Significantly, these organizations, as well as the southern black press, usually played possum in Dixie.

If southern blacks sympathized with the MOWM or the NAACP, few whites knew about it. The black southerner's existence depended upon getting along with whites, and while some militants did form ideological alliances among themselves and with such white liberals as Will Alexander, Virginius Dabney, Jonathan Daniels, and Mark Ethridge, ordinary folk shunned publicity. They coexisted in a separate and unequal society within the bounds prescribed for them.

Although southern blacks remained outwardly calm, white southerners in 1940 took a defensive stance. The vague rumors about the radical Chicago Defender, Pittsburgh Courier, and NAACP suggested outside threats to an ordered society. As C. Vann Woodward observed, the "southern identity" was one of "frustration, failure, and defeat." As such, it bore a defensive attitude toward many things, not the least of which was the system of race relations.[19]

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[18] Nancy J. Weiss, The National Urban League, 1910-1940 (New York, 1974), 246.

[19] C. Vann Woodward, "The Search for Southern Identity," in Woodward, The Burden of Southern History (Baton Rouge, 1968), 19-21.

As American entry into the war drew closer this delicate caste system appeared to the white southerner to be in jeopardy. Already, war preparedness affected the southern (as well as the non-southern) way of life. When something as historically sensitive as the relationship between blacks and whites began to show signs of change, the ordinary white began to wonder, as Gunnar Myrdal revealed, whether he would be forced to "relinquish white supremacy." Would he have to allow blacks to marry his daughters or build good schools for blacks even though the schools his own children attended were not adequate? "Is he supposed to retreat from all 'southern traditions?' He sees 'outside aggression' wherever he turns."[20]

As the nation shifted to a wartime footing, alterations had to be made in many areas of life, testing the southern system of race relations. Population redistribution, previously mentioned, caused potentially critical difficulties in war centers. A Senate committee charged with investigating this problem estimated in 1941 that because of the growth of defense industries and military facilities, the populations of some thirty-eight "critical" defense areas would rise markedly. For the eight southeastern states that formed the Army's Fourth Corps area, the civilian population in nineteen defense centers would increase by 296,220, apparently within a year. For the same centers, the committee estimated that 72,545 new housing units and 1,542 hospital beds would be required. All of this had to take place in areas with inadequate transportation (no new buses or autos after 1941), inadequate public services, and increasing manpower shortages.

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[20]Myrdal, An American Dilemma, 1012.

As a result, when blacks and whites began to pour into these areas friction mounted.[21]

As war preparedness in the South continued through 1940 and 1941, straining race relations, violence began to appear. Urban riots would emerge later, but two forms of violence grew ominously during this period--lynching and military violence. Both reflected growing racial tension in the South, tension which would by 1943 evince such destructive force that it would seriously jeopardize the domestic war effort. The violence of 1940-1941 was a prologue for what was to come.

Lynching had been a concern in the South for many years. It had grown to fearful proportions during Reconstruction and reached another peak around the turn of the century. Tuskegee Institute, the NAACP, and the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching kept statistics for each year, publishing the gory details to garner support for anti-lynching legislation.

Part of the legal difficulty in dealing with lynch mobs lay in the conflict between federal and state jurisdiction. If no civil liberties had been violated under federal law, the Justice Department could not enter a case. The state, in turn, passed a lynching case along to the local law enforcement system; this normally resulted in no indictments and no punishment. Lynchings usually occurred in thinly populated areas where everybody

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[21]The eight Fourth Corps Area states were Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. U. S., Congress, House, Select Committee Investigating National Defense Migration, Hearings before the Select Committee Investigating National Defense Migration, Pursuant to H. Res. 113: A Resolution to Inquire Further into the Interstate Migration of Citizens, Emphasizing the Present and Potential Consequences of the Migration Caused by the National Defense Program, pt. 11, 77th Cong., 1st sess., 4374-77.

knew each other; there was a certain amount of risk involved if a grand jury indicted a neighbor. Moreover, in many instances local blacks were regarded as expendable. Because of the lack of adequate law enforcement in rural areas, a lynching could be made into a public spectacle without any of the offenders having to worry about reprisals.

Seeking to solve the jurisdictional tangle, the NAACP had been actively committed to a federal anti-lynching measure since 1911, two years after its formation. In 1922 the Dyer Bill, sponsored in part by the NAACP, passed the House of Representatives but never got to the Senate floor. Eleven years later the association tried again--this time with the Costigan-Wagner Bill. This provided for the punishment of local officials found delinquent in protecting citizens from mobs, stiff penalties for lawmen who aided lynchers, and federal intervention in a lynching case if local authorities had taken no action within thirty days after the alleged crime. In addition, the bill defined the crime in general terms as any non-labor related attempt on the part of a mob (three or more persons) to exercise "by physical violence and without authority of law, any power of correction or punishment over any citizen" under the pale of the law. Any such violence "which results in the death or maiming of the victim," the bill concluded, "shall constitute 'lynching' within the meaning of this Act."[22] Although the NAACP sponsored a sizeable publicity campaign to gain support for the Costigan-Wagner Bill, its efforts proved fruitless. The

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[22]Robert L. Zangrando, "The NAACP and a Federal Antilynching Bill, 1934-1940," Journal of Negro History, 50 (April 1965), 106-8; U. S., Congress, Senate, A Bill to Assure to Persons Within the Jurisdiction of Every State Due Process of Law and Equal Protection of the Laws, and to Prevent the Crime of Lynching, 76th Cong., 1st sess., S. 845, p. 2. Copy in "Lynching--1940," GOF, NAACP Papers.

legislation failed in the Senate, and when it was revived in 1940, its proponents could not garner enough votes to invoke cloture.[23]

During the course of the 1940 fight over the anti-lynching bill, a series of letters between Walter White, Executive Secretary of the NAACP, and Alben W. Barkley of Kentucky, Senate majority leader, reflected the hostility generated by the controversy. White evidently had a way of irritating people, and when in April he accused Barkley of holding up the anti-lynching bill, the Kentuckian hotly denied it, protesting that "this statement is so ridiculous and baseless that no one outside an insane asylum would believe it, and no one who had any regard for truth would make it."[24]

Yet in October Barkley found an excuse to remove the bill from consideration when he stated that "I am willing to take the responsibility of saying that in the midst of our international situation . . . it is impractical at this time to make a futile effort to obtain a vote on the bill." Not until near the end of the war would another anti-lynching measure be seriously considered in Congress.[25]

The overall impact of the anti-lynching effort from 1933 to 1940 had both positive and negative aspects. The increased attention that the debate focused on lynching did much to heighten public awareness of the problem. Also the number of reported lynchings declined markedly after

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[23]Zangrando, "Federal Antilynching Bill," 108-14.

[24]Alben W. Barkley to Walter White, April 22, 1940, in "Anti-lynching: Alben Barkley, 1940," GOF, NAACP Papers.

[25]Pittsburgh Courier, October 19, 1940.

mid-decade, a trend attributed to the publicity given to the anti-lynching efforts.

On the other hand, there was a change in the character of lynching after the mid-1930s. Beginning around 1936 the typical lynching became less a spectator event and more a covert act undertaken by small mobs in quick and quiet fashion. Lynching victims were less likely to be hanged publicly from a tree and blow-torched and more likely to be fished out of a river or discovered in a remote area days after the incident. It became increasingly difficult to determine whether black homicides were the work of mobs or just individual murder. While the number of reported lynchings decreased during the 1930s, the actual number of persons lynched probably remained near previous levels.[26] For example, during 1940 and 1941 there were eight reported lynchings, but for 1940 alone the NAACP kept files on four additional suspected incidents. Moreover, for the two year period the NAACP discovered forty-nine "threatened" lynchings. While the authenticity of some incidents and near-incidents may be questioned, there can be little doubt that during the war years some lynchings remained undisclosed.[27]

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[26]Jessie Daniel Ames, The Changing Character of Lynching (New York, 1973 [1942]), 2-5.

[27]The eight lynchings during 1940 and 1941 were: Ike Gaston (white), March 7, 1940, near Atlanta; Elbert Williams (black), June 20, 1940, Brownsville, Tennessee; Jesse Thornton (black), June 22, 1940, Luverne, Alabama; Austin Callaway (black), September 8, 1940, LaGrange, Georgia; Bruce Tisdale (black), February 15, 1941, Andrews, South Carolina; Robert Melker (black), April 13, 1941, Cherryville, North Carolina; Robert Sapp (black), May 6, 1941, Blakely, Georgia; A. C. Williams (black), May 13, 1941, Quincy, Florida; "Lynching-1940," GOF, NAACP Papers; Guzman, Negro Year Book, 302-11.

A 1940 lynching in Tennessee illustrated the tensions created in many areas by increasing black militance and corresponding white alarm as the defense effort quickened. In 1939 some black citizens of Brownsville organized a small but active NAACP chapter. As the general election of 1940 approached, its leaders undertook a voter registration drive among the black townspeople. The president of the NAACP branch, the Reverend Buster Walker, met on May 6 with some town officials, who, while not ecstatic about the idea, remained noncommittal. The next day, however, a local deputy sheriff told Walker that he had better stop encouraging blacks to register "or there would be trouble." The whites had reason enough to be concerned, for blacks in Haywood County, of which Brownsville was the seat, outnumbered whites two to one.[28]

As the days passed more militant whites in Brownsville issued threats to the NAACP leaders and in particular harassed Walker, Elisha Davis, and Elbert Williams. Periodically carloads of whites drifted through town visiting the homes of NAACP officials, asking "what about that nigger meeting?"

At about 1:00 a.m. on June 16 whites forced Elisha Davis, a filling station operator and father of seven children, into a car and drove him to a secluded area several miles from town. Some fifty whites awaited him and threatened to kill him if he did not give them the names of the local NAACP members. Davis complied, providing the names of the officers, but reminding the whites that the city fathers had approved the formation

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[28]"Statement of Facts in the Brownville [sic] Tennessee, Case," in "Brownsville, Tennessee--Dept. of Justice"; "Brownsville, Tenn., Investigation, June 27th, 1940," in "Brownsville Tenn. Lynching," GOF, NAACP Papers; Memphis Commercial Appeal, June 28, 1940.

of the branch the year before. The mob then threatened Davis' life and told him never to set foot in the county again. He walked the eight or nine miles to Jackson, where he contacted the local president of the NAACP. Meanwhile, Reverend Walker and a "Professor Outlaw" were also run out of town, and eventually every one of the local NAACP officers fled.[29]

Elbert Williams, another NAACP member who advocated black voter registration, was not so fortunate. On the night of June 20 a local policeman called on Williams at his house and demanded that he get in the car.[30] Williams, an employee of the Sunshine Laundry, was not permitted to get dressed, so he got into the car containing several white men barefooted and clad only in his pajamas. The whites apparently took Williams a short distance to the banks of the Hatchie River where he met his death. On Sunday, June 23, two fishermen found Williams' body tied to a log floating down the river. The corpse had been severely beaten and there were two bullet holes in the chest.[31]

As soon as the body had been recovered from the river and local blacks realized what had happened, Milmon Mitchell, president of the Jackson branch of the NAACP, contacted the national office. On June 24 Walter White met with officials of the Department of Justice. By July 1 the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) had entered the case in an effort

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[29]White to William McClanahan, July 1, 1940, in "Brownsville Tenn. Lynching," GOF, NAACP Papers; Jackson Sun, June 26, 1940.

[30]There is a discrepancy in the various reports about the date on which Williams died. Several sources reported the day as June 15, but others, including his widow, said June 20.

[31]"Statement of Facts in the Brownville [sic], Tennessee, Case"; White to McClanahan, July 1, 1940, GOF, NAACP Papers; Nashville Globe and Independent, June 28, 1940; Memphis Commercial Appeal, June 28, 1940.

to determine whether federal laws had been violated in Williams' death and in the forced flight of Elisha Davis and the Reverend Walker. At the same time Mitchell charged that the U. S. District Attorney in Memphis, William McClanahan, a native of Covington (near Brownsville), was a "dyed in the wool" white supremacist who would probably do nothing unless "pressure is brought upon his office."[32]

Since the Williams lynching occurred in the midst of the Congressional furor over the anti-lynching bill, Walter White reminded Senator Kenneth McKellar of Tennessee of his responsibility as an elected representative. "During the 1938 debate in the Senate over the Anti-Lynching Bill," White began, "you introduced . . . telegrams and other communications from southern governors stating that a federal law against lynching was unnecessary as these governors could and would stop lynching." In light of the Brownsville affair, however, "we respectfully inquire what steps you and other Tennesseeans [sic] holding office will take to make good on the promise made in 1938." Unless such terrorism were stopped and the lynchers of Elbert Williams brought to justice, White declared, "this incident will prove that the states themselves cannot cope with mob violence."[33]

While the FBI investigation continued in hopes of finding enough evidence to prosecute under federal law, a Haywood County grand jury convened. It deliberated for two days, and on August 13 declared its findings:

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[32]O. John Rogge to White, July 10, 1940, in "Brownsville, Tennessee--Dept. of Justice"; Milmon Mitchell to White, July 1, 1940, in "Brownsville Tenn. Lynching," GOF, NAACP Papers.

[33]White to Kenneth McKellar, July 3, 1940, in "Lynching--1940," ibid.

"The jury has made a careful and earnest investigation, examining people from all walks of life, including relatives of Williams, and no evidence has been brought out that might place suspicion on anyone as having a part in the case."[34] The NAACP had expected this and would have been genuinely surprised at any other finding. The burden thus rested as always with the Justice Department.

In early September a rumor circulated that despite the Williams lynching the town's black citizens had successfully registered to vote. The NAACP national office cranked out an ecstatic press release claiming "complete victory." But the report proved false, illustrating the NAACP's failure to verify this story as it had occasionally done others, before proclaiming it as the truth. Ecstacy gave way to despair as the national office received reports from Brownsville to the effect that, in fact, blacks had been informed that "the river will be full of niggers" if they tried to register for the November election.[35]

As the FBI investigation continued, despair turned to utter defeat. Despite assurances that the identities of the men who lynched Williams were known and that there was ample evidence of a violation of federal laws, there were no arrests. O. John Rogge of the Attorney General's office reassured Walter White that the investigation was continuing and implied that a federal case would ensue. The FBI was reportedly "actively pursuing its leads," but a year passed, then eighteen months without action. Finally,

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[34]Brownsville States-Graphic, August 16, 1940.

[35]Press release, September 13, 1940, in "Brownsville Tenn. Lynching"; "Statement of Facts in the Brownville [sic], Tennessee, Case," GOF, NAACP Papers.

on February 11, 1942, the Justice Department informed NAACP special counsel Thurgood Marshall that it had ended the investigation, explaining that "it was the studied opinion of the Department that the facts developed did not justify prosecutive actions."[36]

The lynching of Elbert Williams and its aftermath traced patterns characteristic both of the other lynchings of this period and those of the later war years. Perhaps the clearest pattern, ironically, was that it coincided with the new trend toward covert violence. It provided a vivid example of small mobs disposing of victims with quiet efficiency. This new development in techniques was known at the time as "streamlined" lynching because it contained all the major elements without the unnecessary frills.

Local whites perceived Williams' NAACP activities as militant, and his subsequent lynching for activism characterized other wartime violence. Whites saw the racial status quo threatened by black participation in an NAACP chapter. For blacks, however, the lynching seemed to contradict the idealistic goals expressed in the "Four Freedoms" slogan under which the United States aided her allies in opposition to the Axis powers. Such a contradiction resembled Gunnar Myrdal's juxtaposition of an "American Creed" where "the American thinks, talks, and acts under the influence of high national and Christian precepts," with the heart of the "American Dilemma," involving "valuations on specific planes of individual and group living" that included "prejudice against particular persons or types of

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[36]"Correspondence with Department of Justice re: Brownsville, Tennessee Case," undated; Wendell Berge to Thurgood Marshall, February 11, 1942, in "Brownsville, Tennessee--Dept. of Justice," ibid.

people." Thus, because the nation busily prepared to defend the Four Freedoms, the lynching of Elbert Williams denied blacks in Brownsville, in Tennessee, or in the South the right to view those freedoms as pertaining to them.[37]

In this case as in others, the Justice Department failed to prosecute even when federally guaranteed civil liberties under the Fourteenth Amendment were clearly violated. True, the department labored under a jurisdictional burden, but because grand juries typically failed to return indictments, the federal law enforcement agencies remained the last bulwark of justice. With a few important exceptions, during the war era this bulwark proved as flimsy as in the past.

Although lynching had been typical of southern violence, urban racial conflicts had not. Previous outbreaks such as the Wilmington riot of 1898 and the Atlanta riot of 1906 had shown white resistance to black advancement, as had the Longview, Texas, affair of 1919, the last major riot in the region prior to World War II. Although another major southern urban riot would not take place until 1943, during the prewar defense effort a series of outbreaks erupted in Dallas, foreshadowing what would happen in southern cities when the exigencies of war strained race relations to the breaking point.

From September 1940 through February 1941 street riots wracked the southern section of Dallas. The city administration, in an effort to support the growing population, bought out several black homeowners in the Howell Street section, intending to raze the area and then build low-rent housing. This plan temporarily displaced a number of blacks, and

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[37]Myrdal, An American Dilemma, lxxi.

wily real estate agents sold several houses in adjacent white blocks to some of these families.

On September 3 violence erupted. About two hundred white homeowners gathered and began throwing rocks and bricks at these houses. When police arrived, the mob split into smaller groups and eluded the lawmen with ease. As white tempers continued to flare, passing black motorists became objects of attention, and police diverted traffic around the area. While the fracas continued, a sizeable white woman spied an agent who had sold one of the houses in dispute and, in a stroke of revenge, flattened him with a "haymaker." The police restored temporary order, but sporadic violence continued for the rest of the week as hastily formed white homeowners' committees demanded that the city pass a jim crow ordinance for the area.[38]

During the weeks that followed the initial outbreak, homemade bombs exploded in various front yards as isolated violence continued. The FBI and Texas Rangers had little influence in denting the terrorism. In mid-February, five months after the initial violence, the Dallas Housing Authority announced that the housing project already underway would be rushed to completion and that a second project would begin immediately. In addition, it persuaded real estate brokers to refund money to blacks who were willing to move elsewhere, and in another section it cajoled several white families into selling out so that the housing problem could be temporarily solved. Only three days after the housing authority announced its decision, another bomb destroyed a house in the beleaguered

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[38]Dallas Morning News, September 4, 6, 1940; Pittsburgh Courier, September 14, 1940.

area. Whites had gotten in the last word.[39]

The real issue, however, proved to be not one of temporary accommodations but of long-term solutions. "Completion of the public housing project, a year hence, will give decent homes to 650 Negro families," explained the New Republic, "but Dallas has yet to decide what, if anything, will be done for the thousands remaining in barbarous shanties and to provide for orderly expansion of bulging Negro neighborhoods." In Dallas, however, the prevailing sentiment rested not upon housing policy but upon racial separation. The editor of the Dallas Morning News proclaimed that "white neighborhoods do not want Negro residents. No law can eradicate personal prejudice or by mere fiat erase the color line." Housing problems and black encroachment on white areas faced many cities as the pace of war preparedness quickened. In addition, congestion, confusion, flaring tempers, and white backlash to racial change contributed to the later and more severe urban racial violence in the South and elsewhere. The Dallas outbreaks and the Sojourner Truth housing riots in Detroit in 1942 provided glimpses of what lay ahead for cities where race relations was evidently the least concern.[40]

During 1940 and 1941 a facet of racial violence generally peculiar to periods of war emerged--the growth of tension and violence between black servicemen and whites. As previously noted, black leaders exhibited considerable concern over the role black Americans would play in the defense

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[39]Pittsburgh Courier, September 21, 1940; October 19, 1940; January 25, 1941; February 22, 1941; Dallas Morning News, February 9, 1941; "Racial Dynamism in Dallas," New Republic, March 24, 1941, pp. 389-90.

[40]"Racial Dynamism in Dallas," New Republic, March 24, 1941, pp. 389-90; Dallas Morning News, September 6, 1940.

effort. The Courier committee had protested the continuation of segregated units and the failure to utilize maximum black strength, yet during the first two years of the war era, the barriers remained. A 1922 Army decision had set black strength in regular units at the same percentage they represented in the total population, but only half of the black troops were to be used in combat units. In practice black strength in the Army never reached the prescribed 9 or 10 percent, because that service maintained only four jim crow units. The Navy restricted blacks to the messmen's branch, the Marines excluded them altogether, and the Army Air Force deemed it unwise to train blacks as pilots.[41]

The chorus of protests from black organizations and the black press reached such a crescendo by late 1940 that President Roosevelt, in an effort to keep the black vote that helped put him in office, announced several changes in policy. On September 16 a White House statement declared that 36,000 out of the first 400,000 men drafted under the new Selective Service Act would be black. It also reported that the Army Air Force would begin developing black air units. While that reassured a number of blacks, North and South, others refused to be mollified. They saw that at least half and perhaps a majority of the 36,000 "lucky" draftees would be placed in non-combatant units such as supply and maintenance. The men would also be segregated.[42]

Blacks remembered the World War I era with bitterness. In a "War to Save Democracy" many of them had assumed that active support of

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[41] Dalfiume, Desegregation of Armed Forces, 22.

[42] Ibid., 36-37.

America's war effort would result in improvement of their status. When the postwar violence against them erupted instead, blacks felt betrayed. To them, the First World War contained a hypocritical element, and based on that thinking they proved wary as American entry into World War II approached. Thus, DuBois' "close ranks" philosophy seemed as improbable in 1940 as the likelihood that he would repeat it.

In the military more than in any other area of the defense effort, hope and cynicism pervaded the black mind. As Percival L. Prattis, a black journalist, observed, "the morale of the Negro in the armed services of the United States is an amalgam composed of his tendency to share the general popular reaction to the challenge of war and death and his reaction to the special treatment he is the victim of in the Army and Navy."[43] Almost all blacks, whether enlisted or drafted, shared these sentiments. Yet they could do little to change the situation. The burden of proof lay with them, and each instance of failure, such as when the 368th Infantry Regiment failed in one of its assignments during the Argonne Offensive of 1918 while fighting under conditions that made success impossible, was a further indication to the War Department that blacks did not make good soldiers. Black troops faced pressures that whites did not, and, as it turned out, there were limits to how much these men would take.

Knowing full well black Americans' ambivalent attitude toward the impending war, on the eve of the general election Roosevelt appointed William H. Hastie civilian aide to the secretary of war. This appointment proved

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[43] Ibid., 113-15; P. L. Prattis, "The Morale of the Negro in the Armed Services of the United States," Journal of Negro Education, 12 (Summer 1943), 355.

as significant to most blacks as the elevation of Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., to brigadier general. Hastie, who assumed his duties on November 1, 1940, had graduated from Harvard University, served as dean of the Howard University Law School, and sat as a federal judge in the Virgin Islands. He faced an unenviable task. On the one hand, the Army held him at arm's length, regarding him as an "NAACP man." On the other hand, civil rights groups and much of the black population asked him to perform impossible tasks. His failure to do the impossible frequently resulted in his being referred to as a puppet for the Army.[44]

The preparedness effort affected most keenly the men who entered the service. Between the invasion of Poland in 1939 and the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the black strength of the Army increased from 3,640 to 97,725; by 1943 the figure had risen to 467,883. During the entire war the Army inducted 920,000 blacks. While the black percentage never reached 10 percent, the meteoric rise in absolute numbers created tense conditions.[45]

Part of the racial difficulty arose from the location of the training camps. The Army in 1940 decided to construct a large proportion of these camps in the South, and most had to be built within a few months. The temperate climate and open spaces with cut-over pinelands "afforded room for maneuvers, resulting in the least damage and delays for farming and other civilian pursuits." Also, southern camps could be built with

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[44]Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, 79-80; Dalfiume, Desegregation of Armed Forces, 42.

[45]Dalfiume, Desegregation of Armed Forces, 44; Jean Byers, "A Study of the Negro in Military Service" (Washington, 1950), 26 [Unpublished: mimeographed copy in Library of Congress].

fewer vital building materials such as heating equipment and insulation.[46]

An estimated 80 percent of the black troops received their training in the South, in part because the Army still clung to the belief that southern whites could best handle blacks. Northern urban black soldiers reacted more vociferously than southern black soldiers to southern racism, and their negative attitude was contagious. In sum, the black trainees in southern camps underwent experiences that "had an impressive uniformity."[47]

In April 1941, shortly after black inductees began to enter the Army, the first "major symbolic event in the long chain of racial violence" occurred. During the first week of April, Lieutenant Colonel Herbert B. Laux, Provost Marshal at Fort Benning (Columbus), Georgia, disclosed that positive identification had been made of a body found on March 28 hanging from a tree in a wooded section of the fort's confines. The victim was Private Felix Hall, a black man from Montgomery, Alabama, attached to the 24th Infantry. The Army had kept the murder a secret until identification could be made. Hall had died sometime around March 1, and when a group of soldiers out on a field assignment discovered his body, both the Army and the FBI began investigations. The study had

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[46]Byers, "Negro in Military Service," 62; Lenore Fine and Jesse A. Remington, The Corps of Engineers: Construction in the United States (Washington, 1972), 273-308.

[47]For example, as early as June 1941, only a few months after blacks had begun to be inducted in large numbers, they were being stationed mainly in the South. Of the fifteen camps at that time with the largest number of black troops, nine were in the ex-Confederate states and two more were in border states. Pittsburgh Courier, April 12, 1941; Byers, "Negro in Military Service," 62.

not been completed when news of Hall's demise reached the public.[48]

The reaction of the black community proved to be as predictable as it was expeditious. The NAACP directed letters to William Hastie, Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, and President Roosevelt demanding a complete inquiry into the incident. The Southern Negro Youth Congress also wrote the President, demanding, among other things, a $20,000 indemnity to Hall's family. Southern white liberal Jonathan Daniels, editor of the Raleigh News and Observer, used the occasion to militate for an anti-lynching law.[49]

In spite of this and other protestations, especially vehement since Hall was in uniform when he died, the Army appeared to bide its time in explaining the mystery. In fact, suicide was not ruled out as the cause of death, even though the victim's hands and feet were bound. The very mention of suicide in this instance sent black organizations and the press into a frenzy. Adding to the tension, the commanding general of Fort Benning thought it was "a sex murder rather than the result of any race feeling."[50]

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[48]Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, 349; Pittsburgh Courier, April 19, 1941; Memorandum, Office of the Chief of Staff, War Department, to William H. Hastie, April 19, 1941, in "Violence Against Negro Military Personnel," Records of the Office of the Secretary of War [Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War], Record Group 107, National Archives (hereafter cited as CASW Records, RG 107).

[49]Pittsburgh Courier, April 26, 1941; "Lynching of Felix Hall, Fort Benning, Ga., April, 1941"; Jonathan Daniels, "The Army Camp Mystery," in "Ft. Benning, Georgia," GOF, NAACP Papers; Southern Negro Youth Congress to Roosevelt, April 14, 1941, AG 291.21, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, 1917- , Record Group 407, National Archives (hereafter cited as AG, followed by the decimal file number under which the document is catalogued, RG 407).

[50]Maj. Gen. L. R. Fredenhall to S. Ralph Harlow, June 11, 1941, in "Ft. Benning, Georgia," GOF, NAACP Papers.

Despite the official pronouncements, the case had all the elements of a "streamlined" lynching, in this case of a man in uniform. The investigation uncovered no motive, and no one was apprehended or charged. But the publicity the Hall case generated caused grave concern among both blacks and whites over the future of military race relations.

As the size and the activity of the military camps increased throughout the South during 1941, tension between blacks and whites correspondingly mounted. On every base the white soldiers outnumbered the blacks, a fact which, when coupled with the Army's policy of strict segregation, predictably led to discriminatory treatment and ill feeling.

Such was the case at Fort Bragg, just outside Fayetteville, North Carolina. The city had mushroomed in size during the prewar months from 17,000, a third of which was black, to 40,000, with approximately the same black percentage. In addition, the number of troops at Fort Bragg had increased to 52,000, of whom 6,500 were black. Within two years a city of 17,000 had been forced to accommodate a population five times that size. Congestion choked the municipal services, housing was at a premium, and recreational activities proved woefully inadequate.

The pattern of race relations in Fayetteville had in the past been fairly peaceable, if segregated. A ghetto area known as "Little Harlem" served the blacks of the city as well as those from the base and was the only area of Fayetteville where blacks were welcome. In 1940 a local NAACP branch had begun operations, a development that displeased local whites. In fact, many whites in the city were generally so conservative

that they regarded Life, the weekly magazine, as being communist controlled.[51]

The standard treatment for black soldiers at Fort Bragg proved degrading both at the camp and in Fayetteville. Many of these men, some of whom were urban northerners, raised an increasing cloud of complaints as they endured this discriminatory treatment. All American soldiers, whether black or white, have historically made an avocation out of complaining, but in this case many of the protests were clearly justifiable.

Recreational facilities, always important in an area with thousands of soldiers, remained inadequate for blacks. They could not patronize the theaters or the nicer eating places in town, and the small black district of Fayetteville furnished the only diversions. On base, the Army did not provide even segregated recreation halls. Also, the black troops inhabited temporary quarters while the whites lived in more attractive and comfortable permanent quarters. The visible differences in living standards made many of the black troops sullen and defensive. In addition, friction developed over the policy of jim crow transportation for the soldiers, especially on the city buses used to shuttle the men between the post and town. The morale among the blacks, then, proved less than satisfactory. Many of the soldiers, after having stayed at Fort Bragg only a few weeks, wanted nothing more than to be transferred to another camp, under the mistaken notion that other posts would offer better conditions.[52]

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[51]Pittsburgh Courier, August 23, 1941; "Fayetteville, North Carolina, Army Camp Impact Area," Report 51, Special Services Division, Bureau of Intelligence, Office of War Information, Records of the Office of Government Reports, Record Group 44, National Archives (hereafter cited as Government Reports Records, RG 44).

[52]Interoffice memorandum to White, September 2, 1941, in "Ft. Bragg--Bus Killing," Legal File (LF), NAACP Papers.

The military police supplied the biggest cause of tension between the blacks and whites. The MPs reportedly spared nothing to make sure that blacks stayed "within bounds" on the base and harassed them while in Fayetteville as well. Black troops not only at Fort Bragg but across the South were by mid-1941 beginning to resent white MPs and asked for black military police in their areas of camp. Yet the Army did not employ many black MPs, and the ones it did use were not allowed to carry firearms--only nightsticks. This state of affairs embittered blacks.[53]

The tensions erupted at about 1:00 a.m. on August 6, as a group of black soldiers stood waiting at a bus stop in Fayetteville for their jim crow bus to take them back to camp. Some were drunk. When the bus arrived around 1:15 the soldiers began to clamber boisterously aboard, apparently insulting the bus driver in the process. The driver, refusing to move until MPs accompanied him to the base, got off and called the police. Within ten minutes a contingent of MPs arrived. As four white military policemen entered the bus, a scuffle erupted. Someone grabbed a revolver from an MP and began firing wildly. Another MP returned the fire, and within two or three minutes two men were dead and five others wounded. Private Ned Turman, black, and Sergeant Elwyn Hargrave, white, lay dead; the wounded included two other MPs and three blacks.[54]

While the deaths of the two men were tragic and unnecessary, the larger significance of this incident lay in its aftermath. Immediately upon

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[53] Ibid.

[54] Fayetteville Observer, August 6, 1941; Pittsburgh Courier, August 16, 1941; Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, 351; Maj. James W. McNeer to Commanding Officer, Ft. Bragg, August 6, 1941, in "Ft. Bragg Incident," CASW Records, RG 107.

hearing of the shootings, Fort Bragg Provost Marshal Major James W. McNeer, ordered all black soldiers who were not in their barracks rounded up and taken to the post stockade. The official explanation stated that the persons responsible for the deaths had to be found, the necessity of which "was not realized by the soldiers at the time and, unfortunately, has been largely represented as a measure involving racial considerations."[55]

The rounding up of five hundred or more soldiers, many of whom had later wandered onto the post from a night on the town, did indeed involve racial considerations. None of the white MPs were treated in the fashion the blacks were, and with the exception of one military policeman, a twenty-year-old native southerner alleged to have killed Private Turman, none were even held for questioning. On the other hand, many blacks reported being threatened and beaten as they were forced into the stockade where they remained for five hours. When they were finally released, feelings toward the Army in general and the MPs in particular had clearly deteriorated.[56]

After the large contingent of blacks was released, the post commander, Colonel Charles Elliott, called for a complete investigation. The young MP alleged to have killed Turman went before a court-martial and within a week had been acquitted. Ballistics showed that the MP's revolver was not the one that killed the black soldier. As a result, no one was ever convicted for either of the deaths.

In the meantime the NAACP sent Curtiss Todd, a Raleigh lawyer, to Fayetteville where he circulated among the soldiers and found a feeling

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[55]Fayetteville Observer, August 6, 1941; Henry L. Stimson to Roy Wilkins, November 10, 1941, in "Ft. Bragg--Bus Killing," LF, NAACP Papers.

[56]Pittsburgh Courier, August 23, 1941.

of general hatred toward the Army's discriminatory practices in recreation, transportation, and housing, and a complete distrust of the military police. In addition, the Army Inspector General's Office sent General Benjamin O. Davis as a special investigator; after questioning 128 witnesses, he found the same bitterness among the troops.[57]

In spite of this, Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson told the NAACP that "a noteworthy feature of the investigating officers' report is the finding that, in no respect did the incident itself, or its after-effects, acquire any semblance of a conflict of racial sentiments; and that the occurrence did not arise from, or cause any tendency toward racial discrimination."[58] Someone in the War Department must have been agitated, though, because the post provost marshal was quickly replaced, and the commander, Colonel Elliott, was in October transferred to Mississippi State College as an ROTC instructor. He resigned from the Army shortly thereafter. Perhaps the most telling change at Fort Bragg came when William Hastie announced in mid-September that the military police would soon contain a large number of blacks and that they would be invested with the same authority as their white counterparts. The Fort Bragg incident, as the first major disturbance in the armed forces during the war years, cast an ominous shadow over the future of military race relations even as it showed the War Department's reluctance to flout local patterns

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[57]Fayetteville Observer, August 7, 1941; Pittsburgh Courier, August 30, 1941; September 6, 1941; Stimson to Wilkins, November 10, 1941; Curtiss Todd to White, August 14, 1941, in "Ft. Bragg--Bus Killing," LF, NAACP Papers.

[58]Stimson to Wilkins, November 10, 1941, NAACP Papers.

of segregation by making substantial changes in policy toward black troops.[59]

Only a few days after the Fort Bragg episode another incident occurred near Gurdon, Arkansas. While the incident in Fayetteville affected only soldiers, the Arkansas trouble broke out between civilian whites and black soldiers. During August 1941 the Second Army war maneuvers had gotten underway, and units from several areas were ordered to Louisiana to participate, including the 94th Engineer Battalion, a black unit formed earlier in the year at Fort Custer, Michigan. The majority of the men were Chicago and Detroit natives.

By August the 94th had already experienced southern racial patterns in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. During the course of its stay there, it had received less-than-cordial treatment, especially from highway patrolmen. This initiation set the troops to grumbling. In July the 94th moved back to Fort Custer and then to Camp Joseph T. Robinson near Little Rock. While there, the presence of the black soldiers provoked yet another incident when on August 9 a white policeman and a black sergeant got into a fight that received considerable publicity and heightened local tension. The next day the unit moved to a bivouac about one hundred miles southwest of Little Rock, between the towns of Gurdon and Prescott. On August 11 two or three hundred men went to Gurdon on passes, and the greeting accorded them again proved less than enthusiastic. In fact, some of the local whites went into near-hysterics at the presence of these men and demanded that

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[59]Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, 352; Pittsburgh Courier, September 27, 1941; October 18, 1941; November 8, 1941.

they be moved as far from there as possible.[60]

This hostility angered the soldiers, and when word came from their superiors that they were to be out of town by 10:00 p.m., they became vociferous. As they began leaving town, they cursed the townspeople and blocked traffic. Apparently the rumor that one of their number had been beaten and thrown in jail also aggravated their hostile disposition.

The following night a group of state police harassed the bivouac area, injuring no one but making threats and causing a general worsening of relations. The white hostility prompted some of the men to ask for ammunition to defend themselves (they were regularly kept without it), a request that was emphatically denied. The white reaction had so frightened the 94th's commanding officers that they decided to seek yet another bivouac area in a more isolated location.

On August 14 the bedraggled 94th set out along Highway 67 en route to a new camp several miles further from Gurdon. The troop movement proceeded normally along the side of the road, but around noon a contingent of state policemen appeared and began ordering the soldiers to get off the highway. Someone had apparently called the police complaining that a mob of blacks was causing trouble along the road.

The state troopers confronted Companies A and C and began pushing soldiers into a ditch beside the highway. Lieutenant Donald Curry, white, commander of Company C, tried to persuade the police to leave, but they

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[60]Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, 352-54; Motley, Invisible Soldier, 40-43; Memorandum, Hastie to the Adjutant General, October 10, 1941; Statement of Pvt. Clarence Woods, Jr., September 4, 1941, in "Gurdon, Arkansas, Incident," CASW Records, RG 107.

instead hit him and told him to "get them black bastards off the concrete." At that, several of the soldiers broke ranks and closed in on one of the police cars. Their officers managed to restrain them with difficulty. This entire episode took place with two truckloads of white MPs nearby; they lifted not a finger to keep the civilians from interfering.

The worsted Curry and other officers managed to avoid bloodshed only by persuading the soldiers to march into the woods and get to their bivouac as quickly as possible. By the time the 94th reached the new campsite its members were totally disheartened. Matters had seemingly gone from bad to worse during their stay in the South, with no prospect of improvement in the foreseeable future. They were powerless to do anything about it--that is, almost powerless. That night about sixty of the men changed into fatigues and went AWOL. Some fled directly north, others west, but all got out of the South. One caught freight trains from Texas through New Mexico and Arizona to California, then proceeded north and east to Chicago. Most of these men eventually turned themselves in at Fort Custer.[61]

Public reaction was swift. The NAACP, exhibiting growing confidence, asked the War Department to abolish segregation in all military facilities, to train immediately a large force of black MPs for general service, to protect black soldiers in southern camps, and to prosecute the whites who

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[61]Pittsburgh Courier, August 23, 30, 1941; Hastie to the Adjutant General, October 10, 1941; Memorandum, Hastie to the Under Secretary of War, October 16, 1941; Statement of Pvt. Woods, September 4, 1941, in "Gurdon, Arkansas, Incident"; White to Fiorello LaGuardia, August 26, 1941, in "NAACP (War)--1940-47," CASW Records, RG 107.

were responsible for the 94th's recent troubles. At least one black newspaper went a step further and asked that all black troops be withdrawn from below the Mason-Dixon Line. Petitions poured in from across the country, especially from the Midwest, protesting the treatment accorded the 94th. One such protest emphasized that it "would seem ironical if our young men should be called upon and expected to defend what in effect is Hitlerism in the South."[62]

In the meantime the Army had two problems to contend with: what to do with the men of the 94th, especially those who had gone AWOL, and whether to try to prosecute the state policemen who had interfered with the unit on August 14. As to the first problem, Lieutenant General Ben Lear, commander of the Second Army, made his feelings known in no uncertain terms. "The 94th Engineers have disgusted me," he blared. "You are the ones who have started all of this trouble and have disgraced the Army and your race. I have watched you since you first started, and I want it all stopped now, not tomorrow, but today." The Army relieved the commander of the 94th of his duties because he "was too easy with his men."[63]

General Lear also ordered a trial for six of the black AWOL soldiers involved in the incidents of August 11-14, with himself as head of the investigation. The NAACP vehemently protested that action and unsuccessfully sought to convince Lear that he could not be impartial in any proceedings concerning the 94th. Eventually five of the six men stood

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[62]White to LaGuardia, August 26, 1941, CASW Records, RG 107; Pittsburgh Courier, August 30, 1941; Petition from NAACP Youth Council, Kansas City Branch, to Roosevelt, September 6, 1941; AG 291.21, RG 407.

[63]Pittsburgh Courier, September 6, 1941.

trial at Fort Custer in December 1941 and ended up being freed. This result was credited in part to the defense counsel, Major Theophilus Mann, who was the first black to serve in such a capacity in a mixed Army court.[64]

While the status of the men of the 94th remained uncertain, the problem of state police interfering with the military proved a ticklish issue. An Army investigation of the Gurdon incidents, especially the episode of August 14, found that the Arkansas State Police had violated the following federal laws: illegally invading a military reservation, opposing by force the authority of the United States, opposing an officer of the United States, and conspiracy to prevent the free exercise of Constitutional liberties.[65]

A squabble soon ensued over whether the War or Justice Department had jurisdiction in the case. Exasperated, the NAACP requested that Roosevelt decide the dispute, with the implication that the association wanted a prosecution regardless of who got control. The result was that nobody prosecuted. The War Department apparently won the jurisdictional quarrel but then dropped the whole matter with the explanation that the state police and other civilians involved were "not within the classes of persons amenable to trial by court-martial for violation of the Articles of War."[66]

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[64] Ibid., November 1, 1941; December 27, 1941; Telegram, White to Stimson, October 21, 1941, in "NAACP (War)--1940-47," CASW Records, RG 107.

[65] "Recommendations in re: The 94th Engineers Battalion," undated, in "Gurdon, Arkansas, Incident," CASW Records, RG 107.

[66] Pittsburgh Courier, November 1, 1941; December 6, 1941.

The Fort Bragg and 94th Engineers incidents were only two of a rash of outbreaks involving blacks in the military during 1941. Others occurred at Fort Jackson (Columbia), South Carolina, in April; Camp Wallace (Galveston), Texas; MacDill Field (Tampa), Florida, in July; and Camp Davis (Wilmington), North Carolina, in September. Additional minor incidents erupted in and around camps across the nation.[67]

By the summer of 1941 the Army recognized the dangerous potential these outbreaks reflected, yet it reacted haltingly. To its credit the Army took two important steps after the violence of 1941. It established a Corps of Military Police that included black MPs for service in camps with large numbers of black troops (such as Fort Bragg), and created the War Department Special Services Branch to deal with racial disorders. Aside from these changes, which were slow in being implemented, there emerged few other alterations. Segregation continued, white MPs still exercised authority over blacks, civilian-military relations in many areas of the South worsened, and the possibility of more violence loomed on the horizon. Massive policy changes were needed, but the Army evidently regarded such a cure as being worse than the ailment.[68]

By the end of 1941 it had become clear that the war would have a considerable impact in unsettling southern race relations. The signs along the civilian and military fronts were unmistakable, but because of the attention placed on the international scene, such omens were either largely disregarded or ignored altogether.

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[67] Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, 349-51, 355.

[68] Ibid., 357-63.

Blacks had concluded that the Four Freedoms did not apply to them and with World War I abuses fresh in many of their minds, they prepared to confront discrimination. The NAACP, the black press, and many other blacks and concerned whites exhibited an increased awareness of the gravity of the situation, but during 1940 and 1941 it did little good. The most obvious manifestation of deteriorating race relations, violence, would continue to keep blacks down. But its effects would shortly prove disastrous for race relations.

CHAPTER III

"NEARER AND NEARER THE PRECIPICE"

In a 1942 report on racial tension, Fisk University sociologist Charles S. Johnson observed that "in conflict we have merely a mobilization for action in defense of the racial philosophies of the respective groups." Johnson saw the increasing anxiety to preserve segregation and discrimination among whites and the increasing militancy among blacks to achieve equal opportunity, a development that threatened to break the already tenuous peace between the two groups. The rift between rhetoric and reality in wartime America appeared clearer than ever to blacks, and their intensified dissatisfaction with the ebb and flow of events elicited a stiffening of conviction among whites to keep the already confused domestic situation from working to the blacks' advantage.[1]

By 1942 assertiveness among blacks had become obvious enough to cause concern among whites. The NAACP preached that "now is the time not to be silent about the breaches of democracy here in our own land," an idea effectively echoed by the black press. In particular the Pittsburgh Courier's "Double V" campaign became a rallying cry among black citizens, though many whites condemned its implied divisiveness.[2]

As a reflection of the federal government's concern over growing black militance the Office of War Information (OWI) began collecting

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[1]Charles S. Johnson et al., "A Preliminary Report on the Survey of Racial Tension Areas," Charles S. Johnson Papers, Box 373, Special Collections, Fisk University (hereafter cited as Johnson Papers).

[2]"Now Is the Time Not to be Silent," Crisis, 49 (January 1942), 7; Pittsburgh Courier, January 31, 1942, and subsequent issues.

information on factors increasing black-white tension and instituted a regular monitoring of the black press, all of which constituted an effort to take the pulse of the nation's thirteen million blacks. The tone of such reports clearly indicated that the government held black organizations and the press responsible for current tension.[3]

The situation was exacerbated by rumormongering among southern whites. In 1942 "Eleanor Clubs" emerged as a topic of conversation. A figment of the white imagination, these clubs supposedly reflected the intent of blacks, encouraged by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, to reverse the caste system and provide "a white woman in every kitchen by Christmas." Just as contrived were the stories of blacks buying and storing ice picks and knives for some future bloodbath. As soon as southern white men joined the Army, another rumor insisted, their women would fall prey to great hordes of lascivious blacks who would then proceed to mongrelize the race.[4]

There was no basis for any of these rumors. That they spread like wildfire from Virginia to Texas indicated that whites were once again invoking a siege mentality in response to what they perceived as growing assertiveness on the part of southern blacks. Aside from the actions of a few southern black leaders, this militance derived from a trickle-down effect from the northern black press, the NAACP, the National Negro Congress, the March on Washington Movement, and northern blacks stationed in

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[3]Memorandum, "Report on Recent Factors Increasing Negro-White Tension," Special Services Division to R. Keith Lane, November 2, 1942, in "Report on Recent Factors Increasing Negro-White Tension," Special Services Division, Bureau of Intelligence, Office of War Information, Government Reports Records, RG 44.

[4]Pittsburgh Courier, October 3, 1942; Odum, Race and Rumors of Race, 96-101.

southern training camps. Blacks in the South were growing more militant and vocal, and they were accepting the Double Victory idea. Because of this and growing defensiveness among whites, the rift between the two groups assumed cavernous proportions. The danger, however, lay not in the black population's militancy but in the reactionary tendencies of many whites.

This defensiveness became more obvious as the number of black troops stationed in southern camps increased. The fear of black officers was especially strong. These officers contradicted the stereotype, carefully nurtured in the South, of black inferiority and incapacity to assume positions of responsibility. Repeatedly during 1942 legislators and governors appealed to the Army in an effort to keep black officers out of the South. Typical was a letter sent to Chief of Staff George C. Marshall by the Mississippi members of the House of Representatives. Congressman John E. Rankin and his six colleagues warned that such a practice "would tend to create friction that might result in riots, and could not redound to the best interest of the Service." Senator John D. Bankhead of Alabama echoed this sentiment when he took the liberty of asking Marshall to withhold not only officers but all black troops from the South. Apparently Bankhead was upset at the news that the all-black 92nd Infantry Division was to be activated at Fort McClellan, near Anniston. Marshall politely ignored these and similar requests.[5]

As the nation entered the war on a full-scale basis following the Pearl Harbor attack, racial violence assumed a more threatening role in

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[5]John E. Rankin et al., to Chief of Staff George C. Marshall, April 30, 1942, AG 291.21, RG 407; Pittsburgh Courier, August 8, 29, 1942.

domestic affairs. Significantly, the first major incident to occur after the United States' declaration of war erupted in a camp town and involved soldiers and civilians. Black soldiers, smarting at the difference between democratic rhetoric and reality, became the cutting edge of racial militancy, and the Alexandria, Louisiana, riot of early 1942 reflected this situation in microcosmic form.

Before the war Alexandria was a sleepy town of 25,000. By 1942, however, the population had skyrocketed to between 50,000 and 65,000. Part of the explanation for this growth lay in the fact that the area bristled with military installations. Alexandria's rapid growth was not unique, but few towns of comparable size could boast of serving three major training camps and three airfields. Camp Claiborne, with a normal population of about 50,000, lay seventeen miles south of the city and was the largest of all the military camps in the vicinity. Camps Livingston and Beauregard were located nine and six miles from town, respectively, and although smaller than Claiborne, combined with it to form a military population in excess of 75,000, of whom 16,000 were black. Three airfields, Alexandria, Esler, and Pollock, added to the military congestion.[6]

During any given weekend or payday it was not unusual for 30,000 troops to inundate Alexandria. Traditional southern racial segregation prevailed--perhaps even tightened because of the number of black servicemen--

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[6]Hardin H. Nelson, "The Impact of War on Population Redistribution in Louisiana" (M. A. Thesis, Louisiana State University, 1943), 53-55; "A Preliminary Report on Defense Project Area Alexandria, Louisiana, and Vicinity, January 11, 1941," in "Alexandria, La., Reports," Series 13, Records Relating to the Operation of the Area Offices, 1943-44, Records of the Committee for Congested Production Areas, Record Group 212, National Archives (hereafter cited as Congested Production Areas Records, RG 212); Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, 356-57.

so that the black soldiers were restricted to the Lee Street district. This area actually amounted to "four indescribably filthy blocks" which served as the black community's entertainment center. There were bars, nightclubs, and houses of questionable repute where thousands of black servicemen were supposed to have a good time. If they strayed elsewhere in the city in search of diversion they faced "as hostile an attitude as if they were in an enemy country."[7]

There were problems even in the Lee Street area. Camp Beauregard furnished the military police for the city, both white and black, and the usual practice in the black district was to augment the unarmed black MPs with roving groups of white MPs. White military police and the local police force proved notoriously rough on black soldiers and apparently amused themselves by periodically overriding the authority of the black MPs. Over-zealous black military policemen sometimes chose to be unnecessarily harsh with black soldiers to gain a measure of approval from their superiors. In such an atmosphere trouble proved unavoidable, especially from blacks who hailed from the North or Midwest and were unaccustomed to the oppression they found in Alexandria.[8]

On Saturday night, January 10, the Lee Street district buzzed with the usual weekend activity as civilian and military fun-seekers choked the streets and bars. Black MPs made themselves conspicuous, and the atmosphere was one of restrained gaiety. During the midst of this revelry

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[7]Byers, "Negro in Military Service," 63.

[8]Memorandum, Col. Lathe B. Row to the Inspector General, July 16, 1943, AG 291.21, RG 407.

a white woman drove along Lee Street and at one point honked the horn and yelled for a black soldier crossing the thoroughfare to get out of the way. The soldier unthinkingly replied, "would you run over a soldier?" At that the woman got the attention of a white city policeman standing nearby who proceeded to arrest the soldier.

Resenting what they considered an unnecessary display of force, several black GIs gathered around the policeman and the soldier, intent upon rescuing him. Within minutes a band of sixty white MPs appeared on the scene, and a free-for-all broke out. Hand to hand combat sent members of both sides tumbling to the pavement, but evidently few shots were fired until a contingent of state policemen and troops from Camp Beauregard arrived. Shooting then began in earnest, and amidst the sporadic crack of revolvers and dull report of shotguns came the sound of broken glass and assorted missiles hitting the street.

The affray lasted two hours and involved 500 black soldiers. By the time authorities restored order, thirty black servicemen had been injured, three of them critically. Officials produced no tally regarding civilian casualties, but evidence suggested that perhaps twenty black residents of Alexandria were hurt. A handful of white MPs fell victim to flying rocks, bottles, and fists, but since the soldiers were unarmed casualties among the whites proved minimal. During the riot white policemen, troopers, and guardsmen entered Lee Street stores and inflicted considerable personal and property damages.

The end of the disturbance came when officers rounded up 3,000 black GIs and took them either to Camps Claiborne or Livingston where they were placed under confinement and informed that the city was

indefinitely off limits.[9] A black native of Wisconsin, a member of Claiborne's 91st Engineers Battalion, capsuled the bitterness felt by the soldiers. "You would think Japan had made it to Lee St.," he complained in a letter three days after the riot. "I am in the army and cant do nothing about it," but because of the discrimination he encountered in the South his despair led him to conclude that "I would almost rather desert and be place before a firing squad and shot down before fighting for America." If this soldier's grammar left something to be desired, his message was nonetheless clear.[10]

As expected, a flurry of activity ensued in an effort to discover the causes and nature of the Alexandria riot. The NAACP affiliate in New Orleans contacted some of Alexandria's black citizens despite the Army's attempt to keep any information from leaking out. Headed by James B. LaFourche, the NAACP's public relations counsel for the southern regional branches, the New Orleans-based investigation served as the main source of material for the national office's complaint to the War Department. Unfortunately, LaFourche's report proved sensational and inaccurate. The report charged that ten black soldiers had been killed during the violence, an allegation nowhere else corroborated. When repeated in the press and sent to the War Department, the report proved embarrassing to Walter White and the New York NAACP office. Furthermore, the report

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[9]Pittsburgh Courier, January 17, 24, 1942; February 7, 1942; Memorandum, Hastie to the Secretary of the General Staff, January 19, 1942, in "Alexandria, Louisiana, Disturbance," CASW Records, RG 107; James B. LaFourche to White, January 19, 1942, AG 291.21, RG 407; New Orleans Times-Picayune, January 11, 12, 1942; Alexandria Town Talk, January 12, 1942.

[10]Anonymous, Co. S, 91st Engineers Battalion, to White, January 13, 1942, in "Alexandria La. Riots," GOF, NAACP Papers.

contained such overblown statements as "the attack on Pearl Harbor pales into insignificance when comparison is made." A copy of the LaFourche report also fell into the hands of the Adjutant General's office, a mishap which did nothing to improve the Army's estimation of the NAACP. "This is the kind of 'mullarkey' on which Walter White bases his recurring letters to the Department, necessitating undue procedures by all concerned," one staff member grumbled.[11]

Though the LaFourche document was in some ways inaccurate and misleading, for the most part its essential points were valid, and Walter White's "recurring letters" to the War Department proved almost always valid--especially in this case. He insisted on black MPs with full authority, denounced civilian interference in a matter involving black soldiers, and demanded an integrated Army. The NAACP did err occasionally, especially when it had to depend on local informants, but it essentially waged a lonely war against racial injustice. For the Army to treat the NAACP's statements offhandedly was as unfair in the short run as it was tragic in the long run.[12]

For its own part the Army sent General Benjamin O. Davis to Alexandria to investigate. Davis must have realized that he was being used by the Army in a distinctly self-serving fashion. To have a black field grade officer investigating would presumably pacify black Americans and simultaneously lend an increased measure of credibility to these reports.

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[11]LaFourche to White, January 19, 1942; Unsigned memorandum from the Adjutant General's office to General Adams, January 24, 1942, AG 291.21, RG 407; Alexandria Town Talk, January 12, 13, 1942.

[12]Roy Wilkins to Stimson, January 23, 1942, in "Alexandria, Louisiana, Disturbance," CASW Records, RG 107.

Davis and others did make inquiries, but their conclusions proved superficial. In one passage the investigative officer came to the understated conclusion that "civilian policemen and one military policeman indulged in indiscriminate and unnecessary shooting." Another report came to the comforting conclusion that insofar as the underlying causes were concerned there was "nothing . . . subversive about the disorder in Alexandria." Instead, "it all came about as a result of personal attitudes, vice, and overpopulation."[13]

The Army court-martialed no one in connection with the riot. In fact, very few persons were brought before courts-martial in cases like this prior to mid-1943, apparently because the War Department feared the bad publicity that could be generated if it tried black soldiers on the basis of inconclusive evidence. At the same time, however, local Army officials kept Alexandria off limits to blacks until March 10, and in the meantime civilian officials tried to ban northern black newspapers from the area because of allegedly inflammatory remarks concerning the January riot. In a denial of responsibility such as the War Department customarily made following incidents like the one in Alexandria, it declared that solving social problems was not among its responsibilities. Instead, its task consisted of training a fighting force. The NAACP reminded the department that it was training a citizens' army and not a professional one,

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[13]Pittsburgh Courier, January 24, 31, 1942; Memorandum, Hastie to the Secretary of the General Staff, January 19, 1942; Memorandum, Thornton R. Greene to the Officer in Charge [Camp Claiborne?], March 12, 1942, in "Alexandria, Louisiana, Disturbance," CASW Records, RG 107.

so that social problems by definition were of concern to it. This observation fell on deaf ears.[14]

The nature of the various investigations, considering both their source and content, muddied the overall picture. The NAACP in effect blamed the Army for the riot; the Army blamed black soldiers and, in a leap of logic, the entire black community along with the exigencies of war. Neither proved willing to shoulder the blame. While the agitation of the NAACP, the militance of the black press, and the unrest among most black citizens was certainly a factor in establishing a volatile atmosphere, the Army bore the main responsibility for the riot. By 1942 it had become clear that race relations in the military were deteriorating, a development all the more important since the black American community looked to the blacks in uniform as the most obvious symbol of their contribution to the war effort. The War Department by 1942 knew the dangers of sending segregated units into areas of the South where traditional discrimination held sway and where whites were anxious about blacks in uniform challenging the racial mores of the region. It also knew that trouble could result when it used inadequate numbers of black MPs with inferior authority to police black sections of camp towns and the camps themselves. Violence could also result when black soldiers, usually more assertive in their new positions of official esteem, did not receive the respect they sought. In short, though the black press and organizations like the NAACP sometimes appeared to value victory at home more than

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[14]Wilkins to Stimson, January 23, 1942; Greene to the Officer in Charge, March 12, 1942, CASW Records, RG 107; Pittsburgh Courier, February 24, 1942; Row to the Inspector General, July 16, 1943, AG 291.21, RG 407.

victory over the Axis powers, the burden of responsibility fell on the official representatives of the fight for democracy. As long as the War Department remained insensitive to the rift between rhetoric and reality, racial violence in the service would continue.

And continue it did. Although no other military-related incidents the size of the Alexandria riot occurred during 1942, a series of highly publicized smaller incidents broke out in various parts of the South. While in themselves not particularly noteworthy, together they formed a pattern of increasing militance on the part of black GIs and defensiveness on the part of whites.

By March 1942 relations between whites and black soldiers in the Little Rock area had further deteriorated since the previous August when the ill-fated 94th Engineers had been dispersed by the highway patrol. Camp Robinson, located eight miles north of the city, in 1942 served the 92nd Engineers as well as a number of other black and white units. Since the events of August 1941, the Army had segregated portions of the city for troops on pass in an effort to improve relations by keeping the races apart. The decision prompted howls of protest from civil rights groups, but the Army did not rescind the order for a year. While in effect, the order evidently produced little in the way of thawing race relations.[15]

On March 22, a Sunday, the customary contingent of both black and white soldiers on pass filtered around their restricted portions of town. One of the black soldiers, Private Albert Glover of the 92nd Engineers,

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[15]"Handbook of Information, Camp Joseph T. Robinson, Arkansas," in "Complaints etc.--Soldiers, F-M," LF, NAACP Papers; White to Hastie, November 7, 1942, in "Camp Robinson," CASW Records, RG 107.

was drunk. Late in the afternoon a small group of white MPs arrested him and tried to take him back to camp; Glover resisted their efforts so they beat him. This incident attracted considerable attention, and one of the onlookers was Sergeant Thomas P. Foster, also of the 92nd Engineers. Foster had received instructions from his immediate superiors before leaving Camp Robinson to oversee any difficulties involving black GIs. Acting in this capacity Foster approached the corner where the authorities had confined Glover while awaiting a patrol car and asked the MPs why they were allowing the city police to take him to jail. "If you don't like it," they replied, "you can investigate it." Foster shot back, "I am investigating it now; we are instructed by our superior officers to look after our men when they are in Little Rock on pass." After further argument the MPs placed Foster under arrest. This action so enraged the sergeant that he jerked loose from their grasp and engaged in a fight with them. The scuffle continued for several minutes until another city policeman, Abner J. Hay, decided to intervene. Either Hay was physically imposing or the MPs wanted the civilian police to shoulder some of the responsibility for this incident, because the military police agreed to let him subdue Foster. The two men then tumbled to the ground while an onlooking cohort of Hay's reached in with a billy club and hit the black man several times, practically knocking him senseless. Hay then sprang up and, with Foster lying on the ground dazed and bleeding, emptied his revolver. Foster succumbed a few hours later at a local hospital from the result of four bullet wounds. He was unarmed.[16]

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[16]"Investigation Conducted by Mr. Frank H. Patton, Special Assistant to the Attorney General of the United States, before the Federal Grand Jury for the Eastern District of Arkansas, Western Division, Concerning the

This cold blooded murder was so obvious a breach of justice that the civil and military authorities immediately ordered the usual investigation--but not until after all black soldiers had been rounded up and taken back to camp. This feature of Army justice had become an automatic procedure; no matter where the fault lay in any racial incident, the Army assumed blacks were guilty. Since Hay was not in the military, the Army could do little besides ask the Justice Department to intervene. In the meantime Little Rock Chief of Police J. A. Pitcock promised to conduct an internal investigation of Hay's conduct in the Foster shooting, but he ended up exonerating the policeman of any wrongdoing. Echoing this conclusion, the local prosecuting attorney announced that Hay "was clearly acting in self-defense."

A "Negro Citizens Committee" made up of prominent blacks in the Little Rock area refused to give up. Combined with pressure from the War Department, which wanted to keep local authorities from meddling in military matters, this committee's badgering finally led Attorney General Francis Biddle to order a U. S. Grand Jury to investigate the case. Sam Rorex, the U. S. District Attorney, and Frank H. Patton, special assistant to Biddle and former Attorney General of New Mexico, received orders to head this probe. Rorex noted that "this killing has been picked up by Axis propaganda agencies and a distorted account of it broadcast by German radio stations" and that "they emphasized that it happened in the home town of Gen. MacArthur."[17]

Death of Sergeant Thomas P. Foster, June 10, 1942," AG 291.21, RG 407; Pittsburgh Courier, March 28, 1942; Arkansas State Press, March 27, 1942.

[17]Pittsburgh Courier, April 4, 1942; May 16, 1942; Arkansas State Press, April 10, 24, 1942; May 1, 8, 1942.

On June 10 the grand jury probe began. Frank Patton warned the jury, which included three blacks, that both the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution and a corresponding civil rights statute (Section 52, Title 18, U. S. Code) had been violated. He then related the facts in the case and in the process attempted to shame the jurors into returning a true bill. After two days of hearings, however, the jury failed to return a true bill by a vote of nineteen to four. Conflicting testimony, racial prejudice, and perhaps the timely induction of Hay into the Army on June 8 contributed to the jury's decision. Using its last option to prosecute Hay, the Justice Department tried to get him discharged from the Army, but in a letter to Biddle, War Secretary Henry Stimson refused. "Inasmuch as the Federal grand jury . . . returned a 'no bill,'" Stimson argued, "and as it appears there are no charges now pending against this soldier . . . there is no reason why he should be discharged . . . at this time."[18]

An incident at Tuskegee Army Air Field, Alabama, quickly followed the Foster killing. This installation had been completed in July 1941 as part of the incentives President Roosevelt promised black Americans prior to the election of 1940.[19] The base, however, was shrouded in controversy from the very beginning. The NAACP contested the creation of an all-black

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[18]Arkansas State Press, June 12, 1942; "Investigation Concerning Thomas P. Foster, June 10, 1942"; Wendell Berge to Maj. Gen. J. A. Ulio, June 17, 1942; Francis Biddle to Stimson, May 8, 1943, AG 291.21, RG 407; Stimson to Biddle, May 25, 1943, AG 2247, RG 407.

[19]These incentives included training black pilots, inducting the proper percentage of blacks into the Army, the appointments of Davis as brigadier general and Hastie as civilian aide, training of black officers, and other steps designed to garner northern black support for Roosevelt's reelection bid. Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, 75-79.

pilot training center, arguing that black pilots would be denied valuable experience in not flying with larger groups. William Hastie tried to mollify the association and at the same time extract an explanation from the Army Air Force, but both attempts failed. Even though Tuskegee Field graduated almost one thousand black pilots, including the members of the famed 99th Pursuit Squadron under Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., it remained the subject of heated controversy.[20]

On April 1, 1942, a city policeman arrested a black soldier in the town of Tuskegee on charges of drunkenness. Immediately five black MPs demanded that the soldier be turned over to them. This led to a verbal exchange but came to an abrupt halt when one of the MPs took the prisoner at gunpoint. Within minutes the city police, a deputy sheriff, two state troopers, and fifteen armed citizens converged on the MPs, beat one of them senseless, and recovered the soldier. A large group of excited white and black citizens then gathered, and a general melee was barely avoided. The local police chief considered it miraculous that no one was killed.

Black soldiers found in town were confined to the base for at least two weeks. A probe of the incident revealed deep-seated racial prejudices as well as a worsening of conditions due to the condescending attitude of the base commander, Colonel Frederick Kimble. According to published accounts, there had been "extreme tension" at Tuskegee Field for some months, but the black press had not exposed the problem because it did not want to embarrass the darling of all black units, the 99th Pursuit Squadron.

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[20]Guzman, Negro Year Book, 355-56; White to Hastie, January 17, 1941; Hastie to White, January 24, 1941; White to Hastie, January 28, 1941, in "Tuskegee Air Base," GOF, NAACP Papers.

Whether tension existed remained a matter of conjecture. Yet something evidently rankled the War Department in connection with the April 1 incident because it transferred Colonel Kimble later in the year. Morale reportedly improved thereafter.[21]

This episode received more publicity than it warranted. It could have been a much more serious affray with the likelihood of deaths involved, but no riot occurred. The incident received front page coverage because it involved the controversial all-black pilot training center and because the first groups of black flier trainees were present when it occurred. Significantly, the incident was portentous, for such episodes were repeated time and again all over the nation--and overseas--during the war. Though most of these near-riots received little attention, their impact on, and evidence of, the deterioration of race relations proved real enough indeed.[22]

As blacks in uniform became a common sight in the South, the color line assumed an almost sacred position in the white mind. The difficulties of black MP Charles Reco provided a much-publicized reminder not only of

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[21]Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, 356-57; Pittsburgh Courier, April 25, 1942; January 2, 16, 1943; "Supplemental Report of Liaison Officer, SOS, on Racial Relations in Alabama to Chief of Labor Relations Branch, Civilian Personnel Division, Services of Supply, September 17, 1942," in "Monthly Mopac Area Reports: Labor Mobilization and Utilization, Negro Recruitment," Series 11, WMC Records, RG 211.

[22]For example, in addition to the military-related incidents described in the text, riots and near-riots occurred in the following locations during 1942, generating little national publicity but, like the others, causing bitterness between blacks and whites: Fort Dix, New Jersey, April 9; Nashville, Tennessee, September 1; New Orleans, Louisiana, November 2; Phoenix, Arizona, November 27; Vallejo, California (Mare Island Naval Ammunition Depot), December 26. Pittsburgh Courier, April 18, 1942; September 19, 1942; November 14, 1942; January 9, 1943; Ulio to Truman K. Gibson, November 27, 1943, in "Phoenix Riots," CASW Records, RG 107.

how black military policemen were regarded by white civilians but also of how tightly the color line was drawn. This incident added yet another bruise to the already battered race relations between black and white southerners. Private Reco, normally on duty in Nevada, received in late July 1942 a furlough to his hometown, Beaumont, Texas. Beaumont, situated between Houston and the Louisiana border, served in 1942 as a center of petroleum production and had undergone such rapid growth since 1940 that its municipal services had deteriorated badly. The city's bus system, which had to make do with the equipment on hand at the beginning of the war buildup, proved a constant source of friction. Altercations had broken out over blacks standing in aisles ahead of the jim crow dividing line because of overcrowded conditions.[23]

On the morning of July 27 Private Reco, in civilian clothes, boarded a city bus near his home but found the jim crow section full. The white section contained only five people, so the soldier sat down in the seat just ahead of the dividing line. The eagle-eyed bus driver noticed this irregularity immediately and ordered Reco either to move back or get off. The black GI responded by roundly cursing the driver. The driver then called the police, and quickly four city officers arrived. They attempted to arrest Reco for using abusive language, but the soldier resisted. After a brief scuffle in which one of the policemen broke his hand, the officers managed to get Reco into the squad car. Once in custody, however, he continued the struggle and reached for the holstered revolver of one of the officers. The policeman turned to Reco, and with the soldier's hand

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[23]Houston Informer, August 1, 1942. For stories on bus incidents, see Beaumont Enterprise, July 1, 3, 1942.

grasping the barrel, shot him three times. Another policeman shot Reco once more, and the officer with the broken hand managed to club him with his nightstick. Instead of proceeding to the hospital, the policemen drove first to the station where they booked the perforated but still conscious Reco on charges of using abusive language. Later in the day military authorities removed him to a hospital at Fort Crockett, near Galveston, where he eventually recovered.[24]

An avalanche of protest descended upon Beaumont from the NAACP, which boasted a chapter in that city as well as in nearby Houston. The War Department also protested the action as an unwarranted and reckless assault upon a soldier. Beaumont's Chief of Police, Ross Dickey, attempted to explain away the incident by asserting that "I am not going to have any of my officers cut or beaten by anyone while making an arrest." The War Department persisted, however, and on August 14 Attorney General Francis Biddle set in motion a federal grand jury hearing on the case to determine whether Reco's civil rights had been violated.[25] Meanwhile a local grand jury already in session voluntarily picked up the case. Beginning the last few days in July, the jury collected depositions from scores of people, probably all white, including Chief Dickey and other policemen. On August 19 the jury failed to return an indictment. It exonerated all four policemen involved in the case even though the evidence pointed strongly toward an infringement upon Reco's rights. The decision reflected the local

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[24]Beaumont Enterprise, July 28, 1942; August 15, 1942; Houston Informer, August 1, 1942.

[25]Beaumont Enterprise, July 28, 1942; August 15, 1942.

attitude toward blacks, especially those who tried to assume any authority, whether military policemen or not.[26]

After this the federal efforts to secure an indictment expired. The FBI obtained evidence, but the long awaited federal grand jury never convened. Attorney General Biddle announced somewhat lamely that the attempt for a federal case had been dropped because there appeared to be "no prospect of conviction."[27]

As if the Foster, Tuskegee, and Reco incidents had not been enough, the final episode of this nature prior to the spring of 1943 provoked the loudest repercussions and acted as a kind of last warning before the storm of violence erupted the following year in and around military camps across the South. Private Raymond Carr, a black MP from Camp Beauregard, Louisiana, had been inducted into the Army in mid-1942. He hailed from Louisiana and thus had by necessity become schooled in the ways of southern race relations. On the night of October 31, 1942, Carr and another black MP, Private John Spears, were on duty at the corner of 10th and Washington Streets in Alexandria. Relations between black soldiers and white civilians had been strained since the January riot. At about 1:00 a.m. on November 1, a black couple approached Carr and Spears. The two argued between themselves and occasionally spoke to the MPs, the woman insisting that the man had hit her and asking for protection. The MPs refused to get involved since the matter did not lie within their jurisdiction, but the couple kept following them anyway, arguing incessantly.

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[26] Ibid., August 20, 1942.

[27] Ibid., August 25, 1942; Walter White, "Behind the Harlem Riot," New Republic, August 16, 1943, pp. 220-22.

A few minutes later two Louisiana state policemen arrived and, hearing the commotion, asked the civilians the nature of their problem. After unsuccessfully trying to figure out the cause of the squabble, one of the state troopers, Dalton McCollum, decided simply to arrest all four blacks and worry about the difficulty later. Carr and Spears informed the troopers that they were not going anywhere until they were properly relieved of their duties, since they could be court-martialed if they did. At that the two troopers put the civilians in their car, deposited them at the station, picked up two more troopers, and returned to the scene. Armed to the teeth and in a hostile disposition, the troopers attempted to arrest the MPs, who had only nightsticks as weapons. Spears surrendered readily but Carr fled, heading for a larger group of white and black MPs stationed nearby. McCollum and Trooper R. H. White gave chase, firing into the air and commanding Carr to stop. The chase ended when the state policemen found Carr surrounded by a group of other MPs while a frantic search for the officer of the day progressed. McCollum and Carr confronted each other, Carr took a swing at the trooper, and McCollum fired. Carr died within a few hours, technically killed in the line of duty.[28]

Since Carr had been in uniform and at his post armed with only a nightstick, and since the pretext for his arrest was blatantly racist,

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[28]Pittsburgh Courier, November 21, 1942; "Report of Investigation of Staff Judge Advocate, Lieutenant Colonel Julien C. Hyer, JAGD on Private Raymond Carr Case, Alexandria, Camp Beauregard, Louisiana, November 1, 1942; Statement of R. H. White, Department of State Police, Alexandria, Louisiana, November 2, 1942, in "Violence Against Negro Military Personnel," CASW Records, RG 107.

it was obvious that McCollum had killed him in cold blood. The next day the local Army authorities began to oil the investigative machinery. One of their first acts, taking depositions, only clouded the issue since the troopers and Private Spears came up with widely differing accounts of what happened. When Lieutenant Colonel Julien C. Hyer of the Judge Advocate General's office talked with McCollum, he found him to be the "typical trooper type, a trifle belligerent, sorry-it-had-to-be-him, could-not-be-helped attitude, not-greatly-concerned." And when the Army asked assistant superintendent of the State Police L. A. Newsome to arrest McCollum until the investigation could be completed, Newsome snapped that he "would not place any state trooper in arrest for shooting a nigger."[29]

Rebuffed, the Army asked Louisiana Governor Sam Houston Jones to intervene so that a full investigation could be made. Jones responded by calling a state grand jury into session. Meanwhile, Hyer recommended that the War Department ask the Justice Department to intervene by amending Sections 253 and 254 of the United States Code to include civilian interference with officers and men of the armed forces on duty. Hyer also asked that a plain-clothes Louisiana operative of the War Department be sent to Alexandria to work up a federal case if the Justice Department amended the law. Neither suggestion materialized, so federal prosecution remained technically impossible. Attorney General Biddle offhandedly remarked that "this is a case for the state to indict for manslaughter or murder and that it becomes a little silly for the Federal Government to prosecute . . .

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[29]"Report of Investigation on Raymond Carr Case, November 13, 1942"; Maj. Gen. Richard Donovan to Governor Sam Houston Jones, November 13, 1942, in "Violence Against Negro Military Personnel," CASW Records, RG 107.

on the ground that the man who was killed was deprived of his life without due process of law."[30]

In April 1943 the state grand jury investigating the Carr case voted not to return an indictment. The Justice Department seemed satisfied with the result, noting that only one of the eleven jurors resided in Alexandria. Wendell Berge, Assistant Attorney General, considered the grand jury to be "above-the-average," and because this "high type grand jury" had "fully and fairly" investigated the incident no further prosecutive action seemed warranted. Yet all of the jurors were from Rapides Parish, of which Alexandria was the largest city. Berge apparently thought prejudice against black soldiers emanating from the January riot and the Carr case stopped at the city limits.[31]

The NAACP availed itself of the opportunity to scorch the Justice Department's half-hearted attempts to prosecute in the Carr case as well as in those that had preceded it. Special Counsel Thurgood Marshall reminded the Department that "Negro soldiers now present in camps in the South are there solely by reason of the fact that they are under the jurisdiction of the War Department" and added that none of the 1942 cases had been prosecuted by federal authorities. "Failure of the United States government to protect these soldiers destroys the morale of Negro soldiers and civilians," Marshall warned, concluding that "it is difficult to believe that our democracy has a chance of survival" as long as it

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[30]"Report of Investigation on Raymond Carr Case, November 13, 1942"; Donovan to Jones, November 13, 1942; Biddle to Stimson, December 12, 1942, ibid.

[31]Berge to Marshall, April 23, 1943, in "NAACP (War)--1940-47," ibid.

continued to take such incidents as the Foster, Reco, and Carr cases so lightly.[32]

While the Justice Department continued to turn a deaf ear to the intensified protests of civil rights groups, the War Department began to worry at the thought of open racial violence becoming an institution in and around military camps. Besides the Alexandria riot and the other incidents already described, various other deaths had resulted from antagonism between white civilians and black servicemen in the South. In October a white bus driver shot and killed a black soldier in Mobile, and in November another black GI died at the hands of a Columbia, South Carolina, policeman. In mid-1942 the War Department's Intelligence Division prepared a report on the subject of increasing racial violence within the service. Characteristically it discussed the possibility of subversive influence among blacks but admitted it had found none. More to the point the report emphasized that the location of the troops, police methods (MPs included), and lack of recreational facilities all contributed to the worsening situation. It recommended more complete training and supervision of MPs, closer attention to the relocation of black troops (obviously northerners), more emphasis on respect for the uniform of the armed forces, and control of the "inflammatory and vituperative articles in the colored press."[33]

The report received a cool response from many staff divisions and from command headquarters. Some officers complained that it said nothing

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[32]Marshall to Biddle, April 15, 1943, in "Violence Against Negro Military Personnel," ibid.

[33]Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, 361-62.

substantial. Others explained that blacks were loyal enough but proved susceptible to propaganda, in this case meaning the black press. Still others were of the opinion that whites in many cases found it "difficult to alter hereditary feelings and emotions," and no order from on high could change them. While the Army adopted portions of the report, they were never uniformly enforced and some were ignored altogether.[34]

At a time when the Axis and Allied forces were locked in a grueling struggle to the death in which the outcome remained unclear, the War Department obviously relegated domestic racial disputes to the back burner. But the disruptive potential of this violence was not lost on William Hastie. Recounting the incidents of the past year, Hastie cautioned Secretary of War Stimson that "this matter has reached the stage where the Army can no longer afford to dismiss the situation by saying that these cases are beyond its jurisdiction." Suggesting that the Army had been unwilling to risk offending white southerners in taking corrective action, he emphasized that "this continuing wave of violence may lead to rioting at any time and certainly it is raising havoc with the spirit of Negro soldiers." To alleviate the problem would involve providing black MPs with sidearms in places like Alexandria, as had been done at Fort Bragg, publicly denouncing such incidents as Raymond Carr's death, and giving federal courts jurisdiction over crimes of violence by civilians against military personnel on duty.[35]

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[34] Ibid., 362.

[35] Hastie to Stimson, November 17, 1942, in "Violence Against Negro Military Personnel," CASW Records, RG 107.

While the Army had a serious problem on its hands, very little in the way of constructive action appeared. Its mission, it repeated, was to win a war and not act as a laboratory for social reform, but not everyone was thoroughly convinced that such an excuse absolved it of responsibility in protecting its men. The irony of tyranny at home while fighting tyranny abroad grew starkly obvious against a backdrop of international efforts to protect the Four Freedoms. The gap between rhetoric and reality, in short, became most distinct in the service. It would apparently take more serious and disruptive racial violence to occasion much in the way of genuine concern in the War Department.

The military, of course, had no monopoly on discrimination or racial violence. In domestic civilian life tension correspondingly heightened as the pace of the war effort intensified. Undoubtedly there was an effect on civilian race relations that was traceable to military difficulties, especially in areas with military camps or large numbers of soldiers. In fact the impact of military violence was felt all over the South, and the causes and effects of military and civilian outbreaks were intricately intertwined. After all, both were based on the same problems and the same minority group. Yet the influence of northern black troops in the South, their heightened sensitivity to treatment by white civilians, and the impact of such incidents as the Alexandria riot may have served as causes of heightened militancy on the part of southern black civilians and rising tension in general.

Perhaps the most serious problem confronting blacks nationwide was discrimination in defense employment. In the South the opening of the job market to blacks in unprecedented numbers fostered a feeling of

defensiveness among white workers and corresponding assertiveness among blacks. The manpower shortage and expansion of vital war industries provided jobs in traditional areas for blacks, such as common laborers, but it also opened up jobs previously unavailable to them--skilled jobs in steel plants, shipyards, munitions factories and other defense related positions. But discrimination continued. For those black men and women who got good jobs in the South, others were left to their own devices or employed in menial occupations.[36]

This obvious discrimination did not pass the FEPC unnoticed. Since its creation in mid-1941, the committee had plunged into its work with little fear and little power. It proved ineffectual because those it condemned ignored it. Yet it busily pressed on, holding hearings in various parts of the nation to uncover flagrant abuses of Roosevelt's Executive Order 8802. In late 1941 and early 1942 the FEPC conducted such hearings in Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York. In June 1942 the roving hearings went to Birmingham where acts of discrimination against blacks in southern defense industries received a thorough, if largely unpopular, airing.[37]

At the outset Mark Ethridge, a member of the FEPC, attempted to assuage tender feelings about racial integration by observing that "where we get into the field of emotional tension is where somebody mentions social equality, the abolition of Jim Crowism or segregation." The

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[36]Lester B. Granger, "Barriers to Negro War Employment," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 223 (September 1942), 72-80.

[37]Ruchames, Race, Jobs, and Politics, 27.

members of the committee might have personal ideas on the subject, he conceded, but flatly declared that "the committee has taken no position on the question of segregation of industrial workers." All the FEPC wanted, Ethridge concluded, was to utilize all the manpower available regardless of race, creed, color or national origin.[38]

From June 18 through June 20 the FEPC heard complaints of discrimination against a variety of industries with defense contracts, among them Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Company of Mobile, Gulf Shipbuilding of Chickasaw, Alabama, the Honeycutt Company of Birmingham, Vultee Aircraft of Nashville, and the defense training programs in Atlanta and Birmingham.[39] As a result, in January 1943 the committee advised these concerns to bring their employment policies in line with Executive Order 8802.[40]

The hearings graphically illustrated the plight of southern black workers but gave only one dimension of the growing problems of regional race relations. They presented what amounted to a superficial look at one segment of the non-farm black population and did not shed much light on the problems faced by many other black southerners. The most telling

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[38]"Supplemental Report of Liaison Officer on Racial Relations in Alabama, September 17, 1942," WMC, RG 211.

[39]The other large industries accused of discrimination were Bell Aircraft of Atlanta, Delta Shipbuilding of New Orleans, Macvey Shipbuilding and Southeastern Shipbuilding, both of Savannah. Hearings at Birmingham, Alabama, the United States of America, before the Committee on Fair Employment Practice of the President of the United States, June 18-20, 1942, Series 19, Records Relating to Hearings, Dec. 1941-Mar. 1946, Records of the Committee on Fair Employment Practice, Record Group 228, National Archives (hereafter cited as FEPC Records, RG 228.

[40]Ruchames, Race, Jobs, and Politics, 49.

gauge of deteriorating race relations could be found in civilian racial violence.

Beginning in July 1942 a series of mostly "streamlined" lynchings occurred, and the composite result heightened tension in Dixie. They also foreshadowed the more intense civilian violence of the summer of 1943, much in the same way as the military violence of 1942 forewarned of later, more serious outbreaks. Together, the civilian and military violence formed a picture of weakening tolerance by whites toward what they perceived as dangerous encroachments on the color line.

During the early morning darkness of Sunday, July 19, 1942, a black man named William Vinson allegedly stole into the trailer home of a white woman near the Red River Ordnance Depot on the outskirts of Texarkana, Texas, and attempted to rape her. The woman's screams brought rescuers, and Vinson later found himself in the "negro ward" of the city hospital after having been shot in the stomach while resisting arrest. The local police proved lax in providing a guard for him.

Shortly after midnight on July 20 a mob of about fifty whites stormed the hospital and easily abducted the wounded prisoner. Someone tied a rope around his neck and the other end to the rear bumper of an automobile. The car's occupants then dragged the soon lifeless body through the streets to the Texarkana Cotton-Oil Corporation plant where the mob then finished its grisly work by hanging the corpse from the winch of a loading platform.[41]

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[41] New York Times, July 13, 1942, p. 17; Memorandum, Berge to J. Edgar Hoover, July 24, 1942; Press release, Department of Justice, July 24, 1942, in Civil Rights Section, Criminal Division, Department of Justice (hereafter cited as Justice Department Records). The records of the Justice Department for the World War II years are in the department's possession at its headquarters in Washington, D. C.

The Vinson incident was one of the few traditional, or blatant, lynchings of the war era. Occasionally a complete disregard for secrecy characterized a mob that did its best to make a lynching a public spectacle. Brazen murder, however, did not make the task of the Justice Department any easier in finding witnesses or members of the mob. Apparently local feeling held that Vinson got what he deserved, so the city police made no effort to find the lynchers though they probably knew their identity. Mayor William V. Brown spoke for many Texarkana whites when he blared, "when rapes stop then lynchings will stop. If you don't play with fire you will not be burned." Accordingly, the Justice Department ordered the FBI to Texarkana. The Bureau predictably found a conspiracy of silence, and after much fuming and fidgeting finally gave up all hope of prosecuting under the federal civil rights statute.[42]

Perhaps Vinson's death at the hands of a mob, tragic though it was, would not have aroused much feeling nationwide had it been an isolated incident, but in October came three more deaths by lynching. The resulting indignation exhibited by black Americans showed a further loss of interracial communication as both groups developed decidedly unfavorable perceptions of each other. The violence showed that blacks in southern society faced the dismal prospect of being forcibly held behind the color line because the society as a whole proved unable to cope with adversity or massive change, and that society's reaction was to lash out at the most accessible symbol of its woes.

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[42]Berge to Hoover, July 24, 1942; Berge to Steve M. King, February 27, 1943, Justice Department Records; William V. Brown to the Reverend Ross D. Brown, August 12, 1942, in "Willie Vinson, Texarkana, Texas," GOF, NAACP Papers.

On October 12 two fourteen-year-old black boys died at the hands of a small mob of whites hear Shubuta, Mississippi, located northeast of Laurel. The two boys, Charles Lang and Ernest Green, startled a thirteen-year-old white girl while playing near a bridge. The girl was on her way home from school and, while the boys and girl knew each other, it is unclear why the boys accosted her. Even assuming that the idea was rape or assault, neither Lang nor Green touched her. A passing motorist broke up the incident and the girl ran away. Shortly afterward the police arrested and jailed the boys. That night four or five white men "overpowered" the jailer, whisked the two boys from their cell, and drove them to the scene of the alleged crime. There they hanged Lang and Green from the bridge, mutilating the bodies in the process. That particular bridge had become noteworthy as the scene of four previous lynchings.[43]

Reaction was swift. The NAACP sent Madison S. Jones to the area to question local black citizens, but no one talked. The implied threat of reprisals from whites kept mouths closed. The International Labor Defense, a communist inspired organization that had helped defend the Scottsboro boys in the 1930s, asked Mississippi's progressive Governor Paul B. Johnson for immediate action in the case. Johnson responded by sending an investigator to Shubuta, chastising the local sheriff, and making a public statement condemning the violence, saying, "every man who helped lynch those Negroes is guilty of murder, and I want the public to know that the Governor of Mississippi condemns the act and will exert every

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[43]Pittsburgh Courier, October 24, 1942; White to Biddle and Victor Rotnem, November 9, 1942, in "Mississippi Lynchings," GOF, NAACP Papers.

effort to see that the violated laws of Mississippi are vindicated." The Pittsburgh Courier and the liberal New York publication PM collaborated in sending a white correspondent, Victor H. Bernstein, to the area.[44]

On top of that the FBI put in an appearance. The conspiracy of silence transcended racial lines, so agents collected nothing substantial. Local whites displayed a certain amount of resentment toward all the outsiders who converged on Shubuta and its environs, since the lynching case was "a local affair." Said one ruffled citizen, "we got our pride, you know."[45]

While the investigations continued and the protests swamped the President, the Justice Department, and Governor Johnson, another lynching occurred near Laurel--only thirty miles from Shubuta. In May a black man, Howard Wash, allegedly had beaten to death his employer, Clint Welborn, a white dairy farmer living in Jones County. Immediately some 75 to 100 white citizens signed a petition asking circuit Judge F. Burkitt Collins to call a special session of circuit court to try Wash, but Collins refused so the trial had to wait until October. The petition indicated that feelings ran high over the alleged murder. Judge Collins scheduled the trial for October 15. On the 11th a small group headed by a local deputy sheriff tried to get Wash released to their custody.

The trial began in Laurel on schedule, and Wash was found guilty. Unexpectedly the jury divided over the sentence, life imprisonment or

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[44]White to Biddle and Rotnem, November 9, 1942; Paul B. Johnson to Vito Marcantonio, October 14, 1942; Marcantonio to Wilkins, October 15, 1942, in "Mississippi Lynchings," GOF, NAACP Papers; Pittsburgh Courier, October 31, 1942; Jackson Advocate, October 17, 1942; Memphis Commercial Appeal, October 14, 1942.

[45]Pittsburgh Courier, October 24, 31, 1942.

death. Under state law a split like this automatically resulted in a life sentence, and when the news hit the streets on Friday, October 16, the reaction proved unsettling. Having decided that the jury had not meted out the proper punishment for a black man guilty of murdering a white, some citizens took matters into their own hands.

About 10:00 p.m. on October 16 a group of fifty whites gathered at Ford's Store outside Shady Grove, near Laurel. This was the area where Clint Welborn had lived, and at least one relative of the dead man was a member of the group. The whites formulated a plan of action and drove into Laurel to the county jail where Wash was incarcerated. By about 11:30 they had surrounded the jail, and the mob had grown to about a hundred. The county sheriff, J. Press Reddoch, arrived shortly thereafter, and members of the throng tried to get Reddoch's keys to the jail. The sheriff, worried about his job, told the mob he would lose it if he turned over the keys. Several of the men continued to threaten him, however, saying that they had put him in office in the first place so he should do as they asked. Reddoch refused but then fled to call Judge Collins, telling the jailer as he left not to hand over the keys. The mob then broke out a window and about fifteen people got inside where they confronted jailer Luther Holder. All Holder had to do to escape was lock himself behind a steel door leading to the cells, but instead he meekly gave them the keys. Members of the mob then spirited Wash to a waiting car, and the procession motored to an isolated bridge several miles from town near Shady Grove. At about 1:00 a.m., October 17, the mob slid the noose around Wash's neck and heaved his body over the side.[46]

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[46]Toxey Hall to Berge, November 10, 1942, Justice Department Records; Affidavit of Allen Welborn Pryor, undated, in "Mississippi Lynchings."

The next day Laurel was swamped by members of the Governor's staff, state police, and state guardsmen, with FBI agents and Justice Department investigators on the way. Governor Johnson, shocked at three lynchings within a week in his state, reiterated his stand by declaring that "I am opposed to mob violence and will do everything in my power to see that the lynchers are prosecuted." The Justice Department had the same thing in mind, and Attorney General Biddle promised "relentless prosecution" if a case developed.[47] Judge Collins quickly called a special county grand jury into session. From the 17th to the 19th the jury presumably considered returning an indictment, but it issued a report which contained no mention of the incident.[48]

While the Justice Department considered its next step the forces of civil rights rose up in arms. One group, the National Negro Council, asked President Roosevelt to proclaim martial law in Mississippi, pointing out that 10 percent of the nation's population should be adequately protected from violence by a federal anti-lynching law. The New Republic editorialized that since whites had begun to lose economic control over blacks because of the manpower shortage and efforts to eliminate discrimination in employment, they were attempting "control over the Negro by violence." The only remedy, it asserted, was for the federal government to stop

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GOF, NAACP Papers; Pittsburgh Courier, October 24, 1942; New York Times, April 21, 1943, p. 52; Jackson Advocate, October 24, 1942; Memphis Commercial Appeal, October 18, 1942.

[47]Pittsburgh Courier, October 24, 1942; Jackson Advocate, October 24, 1942.

[48]New York Times, October 20, 1942, p. 10; Memphis Commercial Appeal, October 20, 1942.

"dodging the issue" and take "a strong and bona-fide approach to the problem." Lester B. Granger, executive secretary of the Urban League, complained to Governor Johnson that people of both races were "revolted over this mob reversion from civilized standards" and assured him that "Axis propagandists are making as profitable use of this happening as they have made of other instances of racial conflict." The persistent NAACP advised the White House that "three lynchings within five days in Mississippi are as much sabotage of our nation's war effort as a bomb in an airplane factory or a shipyard." Only swift action by the government, warned the association, could relieve the plight of black southerners and boost their sagging morale. And Vito Marcantonio, New York's radical gadfly, created the "National Emergency Committee to Stop Lynching," inviting a host of organizations to join.[49]

These and other expressions of outrage, together with the Justice Department's surprising fortitude, carried the Wash case to new levels of importance. Following several weeks of FBI probes a break came. Allen Welborn Pryor, a cousin of Clint Welborn and a member of the mob that lynched Wash, confessed to his part in the crime to two FBI special investigators. Although insisting that he had not touched Wash nor taken an active part in killing him, Pryor revealed the names of other conspirators in the crime and gave incriminating details. On December 11, Francis Biddle

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[49]New York Times, October 20, 1942, p. 10; "Back to Lynching," New Republic, November 2, 1942, pp. 560-61; "The Mississippi Condemnation," Opportunity, 20 (November 1942), 322; Press release, October 19, 1942, in "Mississippi Lynchings"; Marcantonio to Arthur B. Spingarn, October 19, 1942, in "National Emergency Committee--Vito Marcantonio, Chairman," GOF, NAACP Papers.

called a federal grand jury into session to begin hearings in early January 1943 at Jackson.[50]

The prosecution, assisted by special counsel from Biddle's office, hoped to bring an indictment on two counts: conspiracy to induce the police to aid in depriving Wash of legal protection, and conspiracy to deprive Wash of his life without due process of law. Their hopes materialized when on January 12, 1943, the grand jury indicted four whites on the first count and these four and jailer Luther Holder on the second count. The five men were only a fraction of the hundred-member mob, but the Justice Department proved satisfied anyway since the indictments paved the way for the first federal court case since 1903 in which whites were charged with lynching a black man.[51]

In early April the defendants were arraigned in federal court at Hattiesburg, and the trial began on April 19. Judge Sidney Mize received not guilty pleas from all five men on trial, and amidst extreme tension the story unfolded.[52] The prosecution relied on the presentation of highly damaging evidence. The defense chose the old ploy of bawling over states' rights, and in one instance the chief defense attorney wailed that "the people of this great Southland are on trial. . . . It is just another

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[50]Biddle to Roosevelt, December 11, 1942, Justice Department Records; Pryor affidavit, undated, NAACP Papers.

[51]Rotnem to Frank Coleman, January 7, 1943, Justice Department Records; Transcripts of indictments, U. S. v. Shotts, January 7, 1943, in "Wash, Howard, re: Lynching of," LF, NAACP Papers; Pittsburgh Courier, January 23, 1943.

[52]It is unclear why Allen W. Pryor confessed, allowing the FBI to develop a case against him and the others and then pleaded not guilty in federal court.

effort . . . to see how much further we of the South will permit invasion of states' rights."[53]

For some reason, presumably lack of evidence, the charges against two of the men were dropped, so when Judge Mize sent the jury to its deliberations on April 23 the fates of Luther Holder, Barney Jones, and Allen Pryor were at stake. The next day the verdict came in--not guilty. In spite of ironclad evidence and irrefutable testimony the question of states' rights clearly affected the jury's decision.[54]

If the Wash case had provided the Justice Department with a rare opportunity to test the Fourteenth Amendment against lynchers in federal court, the episode that followed it proved even more promising. Yet the lynching of Robert Hall epitomized both the reaction of local whites to perceived or real black advancement and the frustration of federal authorities. In early January 1943 Robert Hall, a black mechanic in Newton, Georgia (near Albany), fell from the grace of the local law. Claud Screws, Sheriff of Baker County, personified the legal system in the predominantly rural area. Hall procured a pistol, an act considered dangerous by whites, and Screws commandeered it. But Hall committed a further breach of racial etiquette when on January 19 he went before the Baker County grand jury and got his pistol returned by court order. Screws apparently decided to teach Hall a lesson, providing an example for other blacks in the vicinity. On the night of January 29, Screws manufactured a warrent for Hall's arrest,

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[53]Pittsburgh Courier. April 17, 24, 1943; May 1, 1943; New York Times, April 21, 1943, p. 52.

[54]New York Times, April 24, 1943, p. 28; April 25, 1943, p. 37; Pittsburgh Courier, May 1, 1943.

charging him with stealing a truck tire. Screws' two companions, policeman Frank Jones and special deputy Jim Bob Kelley, got Hall out of bed on this pretext and arrested him. At the courthouse Screws began to beat Hall over the head, and even as he slumped to the ground all three men continued to beat him. After fracturing his skull, the whites dragged the near lifeless body from a pool of blood up the stairs and through the courthouse to the jail. Screws phoned for an ambulance to take the victim to Albany, but Hall died en route to the hospital.[55]

On February 12, after a Baker County grand jury failed to return an indictment, the Justice Department requested an FBI investigation. Assistant Attorney General Wendell Berge outlined the facts in the case to Francis Biddle and added that from the condition of the body Jones and Kelley may have tied Hall to the back of their car when they arrested him and dragged him the four miles into town. Berge recommended a federal grand jury investigation to be undertaken in tandem with the Wash trial.[56]

On April 10 a federal grand jury in Macon indicted Claud Screws and his two companions, Jones and Kelley, on charges of violating Sections 51, 52, and 88 of the U. S. Code. Again, the essential violation was the deprivation of life without due process of law. Since there was no federal lynch law, the Justice Department stretched civil rights statutes derived from the Fourteenth Amendment over a wide variety of criminal acts. The

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[55]Albany Herald, April 11, 1943; Pittsburgh Courier, February 13, 20, 1943; "Summary of Facts," unidentified report on Robert Hall case, Justice Department Records; Francis Biddle, "Democracy and Racial Minorities," Common Ground, 4 (Winter 1944), 9.

[56]Pittsburgh Courier, November 6, 1943; Berge to Wilkins, February 25, 1943, in "Hall, Robert--Lynching," GOF, NAACP Papers; Memorandum, Berge to Biddle, March 20, 1943, Justice Department Records.

Department's chief of the Civil Rights Section, Victor W. Rotnem, alluded to perhaps the main reason for so vigorous a prosecution in cases such as this when he said that the Hall incident "is being promptly prosecuted and so neither Nazi nor Japanese propagandists have had opportunity to make international capital of this unfortunate incident."[57]

In October a district court convicted Screws, Jones, and Kelley, and the three immediately appealed the decision. The prosecution welcomed the appeal, for having dropped further prosecution in the Wash case it wanted this one to reach the highest court. Assistant Attorney General Tom C. Clark even recommended a direct appeal to the Supreme Court for expediency's sake. Instead, the case next appeared before the Fifth U. S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans. At issue was whether or not the federal government had jurisdiction in the case. The defense argued that the trial should take place solely within the state court system. The prosecution, of course, argued that Screws and his cohorts acted "under color of law" in depriving Hall of constitutionally guaranteed rights, so the case belonged in the federal courts. Here, as in the Wash case, the Justice Department wanted to test the federal civil rights statutes before the Supreme Court. If they withstood the test, a significant precedent could be set. On January 14, 1944, the circuit court of appeals upheld the convictions, setting in motion the appeal to the U. S. Supreme Court.[58]

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[57]Pittsburgh Courier, April 17, 1943; Albany Herald, April 11, 1943. Prosecutions under the federal peonage statute, 14 Stat. 546, were also justified by the propaganda threat. Pete Daniel, The Shadow of Slavery: Peonage in the South, 1901-1969 (Urbana, 1972), 179.

[58]Pittsburgh Courier, April 17, 1943; November 6, 1943; December 25, 1943; January 22, 1944; "Memorandum for the Solicitor General," from Tom C. Clark, September 9, 1943, Justice Department Records, Screws v. U. S., 140 F 2d 662 (1944).

As the appeal pended, Screws posted $7,500 bond, left his cohorts in jail, and returned to Baker County where he ran for and won renomination as sheriff. Having been renominated he was virtually assured of victory in the general election. This action by the voters of Baker County served as a measure of indignant independence against the encroachment of the federal government.[59]

On May 7, 1945, in a five to four vote, the Supreme Court reversed the convictions and remanded the case to the Georgia state courts. In the majority opinion Justice William O. Douglas commented that the real problem was one of jurisdiction, noting that "the administration of criminal justice rests with the States except as Congress . . . has created offenses against the United States." District Court Judge Bascom J. Deaver, moreover, had not properly instructed the jury in the October 1943 case. In the dissenting opinion Justice Frank Murphy complained that "Robert Hall has been deprived not only of the right to be tried by a court rather than by ordeal. He has been deprived of the right of life itself." The verdict should be upheld, he observed, if for no other reason than the fact that "not even the semblance of due process has been accorded him."[60]

After this decision the whole case fell apart. A retrial in November 1945 resulted in Screws, Jones, and Kelley being acquitted of Hall's death, which had occurred almost three years before. The Justice Department must have been deflated, for the civil rights statutes had failed the test. The death of Robert Hall remained unavenged, and though Hall's

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[59]Pittsburgh Courier, March 18, 1944.

[60]Screws v. U. S., 65 S. Ct. 1031 (1945).

widow might not have understood the legal jargon and jockeying that surrounded her husband's name, she understood all too clearly that the men who killed him returned to Baker County as heroes for winning over outside interference.[61]

Together with the rise of violence involving military personnel, the rash of lynchings during the last half of 1942 and early 1943 clearly showed the further deterioration of southern race relations. No matter where the fault lay the increasing incidence of violence by whites against blacks belied whatever attempts people made to soft-pedal the issue. Northern violence, such as the Sojourner Truth housing riots in Detroit and highly publicized examples of discrimination in employment, such as the labor-related dispute at the Sun Shipbuilding plant in Chester, Pennsylvania, proved that racial oppression did not stop at the Mason-Dixon Line. Yet southerners knew that the situation was worsening, and concerned blacks and whites knew action had to be taken to avoid a bloodbath.

On October 20, 1942, only three days after the Howard Wash lynching, a group of southern black leaders met secretly in Durham, North Carolina. These men knew that blacks as the minority would always be the losers if relations remained strained or worsened. The conference consisted chiefly of prominent black educators, labor leaders, and representatives of southern civil rights groups who hoped to find answers to prevent the violence from escalating. Philip B. Young, editor of the Norfolk Journal and Guide, served as chairman. The group produced a statement

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[61]Pittsburgh Courier, November 10, 17, 1945. The other southern lynching of 1943 occurred on June 16 when four masked men took Cellos Harrison from his Marianna, Florida, jail cell and clubbed him to death. Guzman, Negro Year Book, 302-11.

known as the Articles of Cooperation which articulated the views of the men regarding such sensitive issues as political and civil rights, industry and labor, education, agriculture, military service, and social welfare. Essentially conservative in tone, the statement nonetheless recognized that blacks in the South should be afforded the basic rights to which they aspired. "The war has sharpened the issue of Negro-white relations in the United States, and particularly in the South," it declared. An airing of blacks' views on the problems confronting racial harmony, therefore, was both timely and necessary. "The correction of these problems," the group concluded, proved "not only a moral matter, but a practical necessity in winning the war and in winning the peace. Herein rests the chance to reveal our greatest weakness or our greatest strength."[62]

The Durham conference probably reflected the southern black point of view as well as any other wartime meeting. While not overbearing in tone, the conference's statement remained insistent in voicing alarm and calling for immediate steps to ease the tension. The Articles of Cooperation did not bear the militant tones of the NAACP or the northern black press. Rather, it sought firmly to suggest that black advancement should be met with understanding by whites, and the gap between doctrine and practice in fighting against oppression should be closed. In short, it was not a militant document, but it did carry an air of urgency in the wake of racial outbreaks throughout the region.

Shortly thereafter a more spectacular, if largely symbolic, event occurred which further pointed up the effects of worsening race relations.

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[62]Johnson, To Stem This Tide, 131-39; New York Times, November 7, 1942, p. 13.

On January 31, 1943, William H. Hastie resigned as civilian aide to the Secretary of War in protest against the military's casual disregard for his office and treatment of black servicemen. The immediate cause of his resignation was the revelation by the Army Air Force in December 1942 that it intended to set up a segregated officer training school at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. Hastie had worked hard for the elimination of segregation in officer training programs, and the military had begun to respond. With this announcement, all the more difficult to swallow since he had been kept in the dark throughout the planning stage, it appeared that the military was retrogressing.

The Jefferson Barracks controversy was only the latest in a series of problems Hastie had encountered. He grew tired of being ignored since his office had been created for the specific purpose of reviewing all military actions regarding blacks. He had fought against the creation of the all-black Tuskegee pilot training base and for improvements in Army camps where blacks were victimized by racism. Yet his efforts appeared worthless in the end. His resignation made him a martyr in the eyes of many blacks who sympathized with him and knew painfully well of his torment. Truman K. Gibson, Jr., an assistant under Hastie, replaced him as civilian aide. As a result of the publicity generated by Hastie's resignation, the Army Air Force quietly dropped the Jefferson Barracks plan. Otherwise the military establishment generally shrugged off Hastie's complaints or made token changes.[63]

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[63]Chicago Defender, February 6, 1943; Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, 162-78.

As these events transpired during the first months of 1943, white southern moderates and liberals attempted to come to grips with racial problems. These men, active in their quest for civil rights and noted for their moderation, personified a slender tie across the color line. By 1943 they perceived the gravity of the racial situation and sought to educate the public on the causes and consequences of this critical atmosphere. Their rationale, however, differed from that of their black counterparts.

In an early 1943 Atlantic Monthly article, the moderate Richmond journalist Virginius Dabney warned that a small group of "Negro agitators" and another equally small contingent of "white rabble-rousers" were pushing the country closer to an interracial explosion "which may make the riots of the First World War and its aftermath seem mild by comparison." Part of the problem lay in extremism on both sides, and he cautioned extremist civil rights groups that "only impractical idealists will contend that deep-rooted feelings and attitudes, acquired over centuries of usage, can be suddenly done away with." The solution could wait if "the disturbing elements on both sides of the color line can somehow be muzzled for the duration [of the war], and if the slow but certain processes of evolutionary progress can function."[64]

John Temple Graves of the Birmingham Age-Herald proved even more pointed in his analysis, attributing much of the problem to sensationalistic black northern leaders. "They make it plain that they intended to use the war for settling the whole, complicated, infinitely delicate racial

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[64]Virginius Dabney, "Nearer and Nearer the Precipice," Atlantic Monthly, 171 (January 1943), 94, 100.

problem," he complained. Under the circumstances, this made as much sense to Graves as if they had said that "because America's house was on fire America must take the occasion for renovating the kitchen or putting Venetian blinds in the parlor."[65]

The eminent sociologist Howard W. Odum, however, placed the problem in a clear and balanced perspective in an analysis of racial tension when he observed that "even though there would be no inclination on the part of many southerners to deny the great distance between what the South was doing and what needed to be done, nevertheless the psychology of the sudden impact of criticism and accusation, when the South had thought it was going forward, was the key to the speed and intensity of reaction."[66]

These southern spokesmen expressed explicitly and implicitly the lack of understanding between blacks and whites. Both sides knew the size and scope of the problem but differed as to its explanation or how to approach it. Some, like Dabney and Graves, retreated from former convictions by chastising proponents of immediate change as a threat to the nation's war effort. They failed, as had others, to see that by primarily blaming blacks for the violence and the potential disruption of the war effort they were only looking at half the question, because southern whites represented a basic part of the problem.

Their alarm over worsening race relations was genuine, so on April 8, 1943, 115 white leaders met in Atlanta to consider both these general issues and the Durham Conference's Articles of Cooperation. Ralph McGill,

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[65]Graves, The Fighting South, 120-21.

[66]Odum, Race and Rumors of Race, 16-17.

editor of the Atlanta Constitution, chaired the session which issued a statement agreeing with the articles but reiterated that the solution "will be found in evolutionary methods and not in ill-founded revolutionary movements which promise immediate solutions." They obviously wanted a solution of southern problems generated and carried out by southerners without any outside interference.[67]

The Durham and Atlanta conferences brought the ticklish race problem into the open. While the viewpoints varied, both conferences recognized the ominous racial situation and offered suggestions. These meetings convened in direct response to the violence which had escalated since 1940 and which, if ignored, could seriously damage the war effort as well as the livelihood of southerners. Later in the year members of the two groups would meet together, and the result would be the creation of the Southern Regional Council in early 1944.

Yet time was running short. Such incidents as the Alexandria riot and the Mississippi lynchings had by the spring of 1943 painted a graphic picture of frightening proportions. Steps by the War Department, Justice Department, civil rights organizations, and interested parties failed to stop increasing racial violence. Violence involving military personnel, lynchings, rural tension, friction in public transportation, Negrophobic southern politics, the breakdown of local law enforcement, and the spectacular displays of an increasingly powerful NAACP and like-minded groups all contributed to a tension-ridden atmosphere by mid-1943. Race relations steadily deteriorated during 1942 and the first few months of 1943 to the

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[67]Johnson, To Stem This Tide, 140-42.

point that general and widespread violence, earlier of no concern, became a real and disturbing fact. The United States was moving, in the words of Virginius Dabney, "nearer and nearer the precipice."

CHAPTER IV

"SEGREGATION ALWAYS MEANS DISCRIMINATION"

By the spring of 1943 the United States reached a decisive juncture in its pursuit of victory. The Japanese offensive had been checked and with the defeat of the Imperial Navy at the Battle of Midway and the recapture of Guadalcanal Island the war outlook brightened. At the same time the Allies had soundly defeated the "Desert Fox," Erwin Rommel, in North Africa. Heartened, the nation awaited the next move--the invasion of Sicily. Concurrently, the "arsenal of democracy" worked furiously to supply its men overseas, and by mid-1943 war production for the first time ran efficiently. In the midst of this din the nation's race relations reached the precipice. From May through August, cities, towns, and military installations in the South and across the country suffered from racial explosions. Racial violence reached the point that, for the first time, it threatened to disrupt the war effort, though the signs of its coming had been clear enough since 1940. The first of these conflagrations came on May 25 in a choked war production center, Mobile, Alabama.

John Dos Passos, the well-known literary figure whose radicalism mellowed during the war, passed through Mobile in March 1943, providing a graphic description. "The mouldering old Gulf seaport with its ancient dusty elegance of tall shuttered windows under mansard roofs and iron lace overgrown with vines, and scaling colonnades shaded by great trees, looks trampled and battered like a city that's been taken by storm."[1] The storm

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[1]John Dos Passos, State of the Nation (Boston, 1944), 92.

had raged since 1940 in the form of tremendous population growth. In April 1940 metropolitan Mobile contained 114,906 people, 42,518 (37 percent) of whom were black; by the end of 1943 the population soared to 201,369, of whom 57,372 (29 percent) were black. This represented an overall growth of 60.9 percent, a rate unmatched by any other metropolitan district in the nation.[2]

As a measure of the federal government's alarm over Mobile's condition, the new Committee for Congested Production Areas declared the city a member of its "most critical" list, a dubious distinction it shared with sixty-seven other cities. The committee, established on April 7, 1943, consisted of, among others, members of the Bureau of the Budget, War and Navy Departments, War Production Board, and War Manpower Commission. Created to coordinate the activities of various federal agencies in congested areas and in so doing to alleviate the most pressing difficulties, the committee must have developed a collective headache when it looked closely at Mobile's problems.[3]

In the first place, the city had drawn "primitive, illiterate backwoods people" from surrounding rural counties. These individuals, facing a mode of life quite different from the one they had been raised in, became

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[2]U. S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "Wartime Changes in Population and Family Characteristics, Mobile Congested Production Area: March, 1944," Population--Special Reports, Series CA-2, No. 1 (Washington, 1944), 2.

[3]"List of Areas Certified by Federal Agencies as Critically Congested," Series 14, Records Relating to Undesignated Congested Production Areas, 1943-44, Congested Production Areas Records, RG 212; U. S., Congress, House, Hearings before the Committee on Labor, House of Representatives, on H. R. 3986, H. R. 4004, and H. R. 4005: Bills to Prohibit Discrimination in Employment Because of Race, Creed, Color, National Origin or Ancestry, vol. 1, 78th Cong., 2d sess., facing p. 134.

"hostile, defiant, suspicious and terrified." Of the "undisciplined hordes" that inundated the city during the first two years of the war, most swarmed in from southern Alabama, western Florida, and southeastern Mississippi. The thousands of blacks who made up a goodly proportion of this growth hailed from the same areas as well as from Louisiana and Tennessee.[4]

Additionally, wartime production within Mobile's boundaries had ballooned to sizeable proportions. From 1940 to 1944 defense contracts in these industries totaled almost $397 million, 99 percent of which went for shipbuilding and repair. The largest single beneficiary, the Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Company (ADDSCO), saw its employment rolls rise from less than 2,000 to about 30,000 by mid-1943. Similarly, the smaller Gulf Shipbuilding Corporation increased its employment from 240 to 11,600, and a variety of light industrial plants that produced fabricated steel, ammunition, and lumber products grew proportionately. The percentage of those employees who were black, however, varied from 8 percent to 21 percent, with an average of only 16 percent, despite the government's efforts to utilize all sources of manpower. ADDSCO counted about 7,000 blacks on its rolls but, as in most other area industries, virtually all served in unskilled positions such as janitors and helpers. Finally, a new Army Air Force installation, Brookley Field, added to the congestion since it

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[4]Agnes Meyer, Journey Through Chaos (New York, 1944), 202-3, 210; Charles S. Johnson and Clifton R. Jones, "Memorandum on Negro Internal Migration, 1940-1943," Johnson Papers, Box 376; unidentified memorandum in "Negro Problems--Mobile," Series 28, Office Files of Wilfred C. Leland, Jr., Consultant, Oct. 1943-Aug. 1945, FEPC Records, RG 228.

represented a source of employment for 16,000 persons by mid-1943.[5]

This tremendous growth, generated mainly by the expansion of war-related activities, created severe difficulties in Mobile (Figure 1). At large industrial plants like ADDSCO, the amount of labor turnover sometimes reached the alarming figure of 2 percent or more weekly. In such instances the workers filtered in and out of town, creating confusion in housing, transportation, and manpower allocation. Housing proved one of Mobile's most critical problems. One government report complained that living conditions "have not been conducive to efficient operations. Workmen sleep in automobiles, trailers or crowded rooms," and the "hot bed" system, whereby different people slept in the same bed at different shifts, proved common. The bus system and other transportation modes carried thousands more than they were designed for, and about 20 percent of the autos used by workmen in war plants lay idle because of their inability to get tires. Recreation facilities became increasingly crowded, and many workers and their families clogged the streets in search of diversions. The fuel problem at times grew so acute that some war workers applied for releases from their jobs because of it. The disease rate remained a matter of concern. The number of hospital beds in late 1942 averaged only 1.7 per thousand when the war standard was 4.0, and a shortage of physicians and other medical personnel also prevailed. The water

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[5] "Mobile Area, Alabama, February 18, 1944," in "Negro Problems--Mobile," Series 28, FEPC Records, RG 228; "Survey of the Mobile Employment Stabilization Plan, July 26, 1943," in "Monthly Mopac Area Reports, Labor Mobilization and Utilization Employment Stabilization--Alabama," Series 11, WMC Records, RG 211; U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment and Outlook Branch, Impact of the War on the Mobile Area, Industrial Area Study No. 22 (Washington, 1944), 1-2, 27.

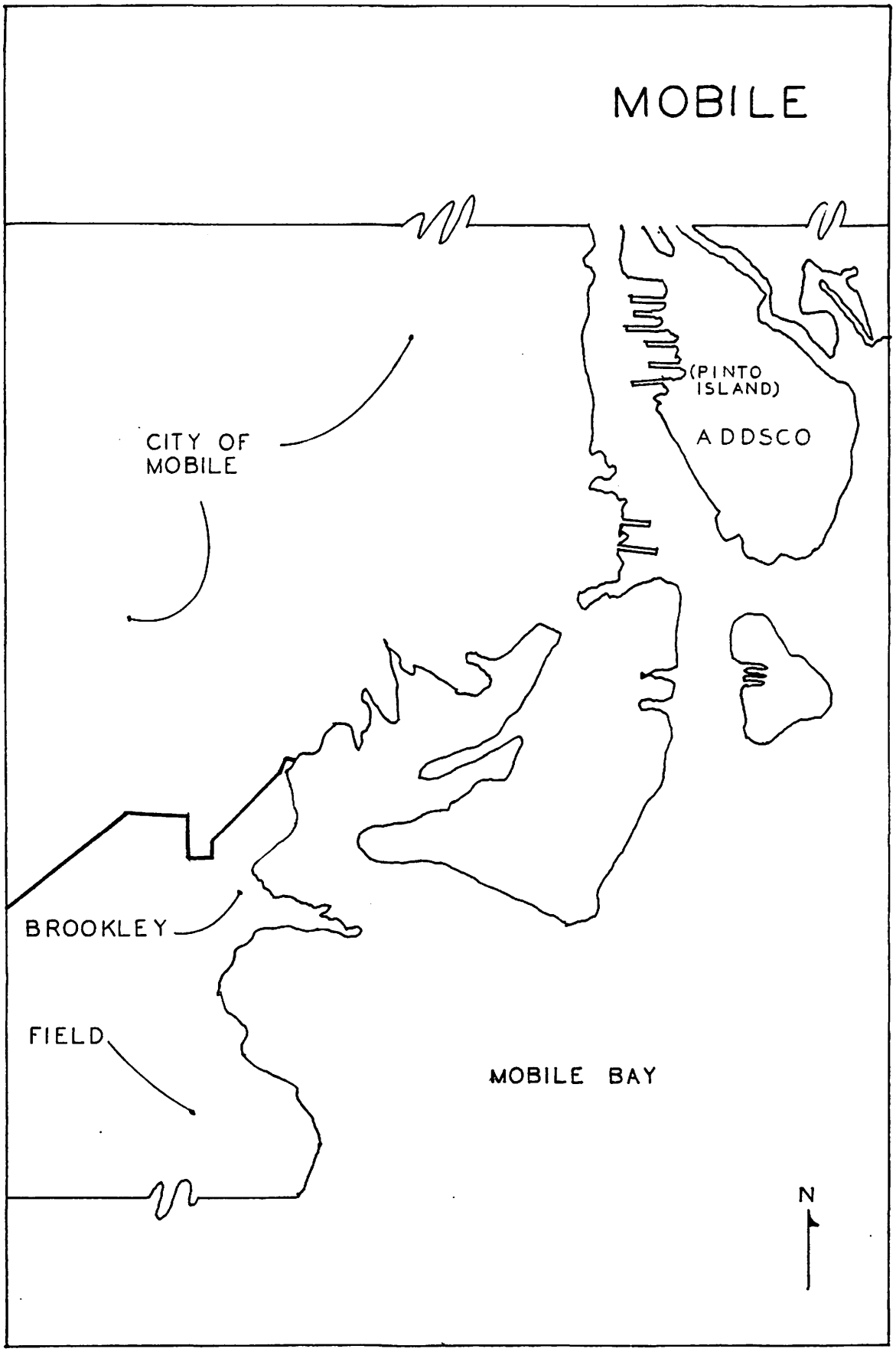


Figure 1. Map of Mobile, Alabama.

supply, sewer system, and condition of streets languished under the heavy burdens imposed by the war. The police force consisted of only 125 men to serve a population that had skyrocketed by 61 percent. In short, conditions proved pitifully inadequate, with many of the most essential services crumbling under the weight of the war boom.[6]

Amidst this situation the city's black population attempted to eke out an existence. Blacks composed about 30 percent of Mobile's population in 1943. The working force within this group had been pulled out of the depression (in a manner of speaking) by the war boom. While jobs existed, however, most blacks found themselves in unskilled or semi-skilled positions, since whites feared black economic advancement and the loss of their cheap labor force. The policy of hiring blacks for menial jobs proved widespread in most of Mobile's war industries, a problem the FEPC and War Manpower Commission (WMC) sought to correct with mixed results. Living conditions, bad enough for whites, were worse for blacks. Housing was at a premium since the city had not built enough low-cost housing to accommodate the influx of working class citizens, and the available housing in 1943 sometimes appeared unfit for human habitation. As usual, black residents were restricted to certain portions of the city, in this case the traditional areas north and south of the downtown district.

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[6]"Labor Market Developments Report for the Mobile Area, State of Alabama, October 28, 1942," in "Labor Demand and Supply Reports, Mobile," Series 12, Reports, Analyses, Compilations, State and Area Reports and Analysis Divisions, 1943-1945, WMC Records, RG 211; "Developing Situation--War Production Area, Mobile, Alabama, October 21, 1942"; "Mobile Area, Alabama, February 19, 1944," in "Negro Problems--Mobile," Series 28, FEPC Records, RG 228.

Transportation and other public facilities remained inadequate for the large number of blacks, and segregation ordinances prohibited them from even standing in aisles ahead of the jim crow dividing line when the buses became crowded. In fact, the bus system in Mobile had been a sore spot since the war began. In August 1942 Private Henry Williams, a black soldier from Brookley Field, got into a verbal altercation with a bus driver, whereupon the driver shot and killed him. Acts of beating and abusing blacks became so common aboard buses that in late 1942 the city forced the drivers to dispense with carrying firearms as had been their recent practice. Anti-black sentiment had grown during the war, especially since the influx of rural whites brought more provincial attitudes to the area. Congestion forced the two groups to coexist in closer proximity to each other, so heightened tension automatically resulted.

Though seen by many blacks as highly beneficial, the city's NAACP chapter also increased friction. Founded in 1925, the Mobile branch by 1940 had developed into a highly visible symbol of black pride. John LeFlore, a singularly fortitudinous individual who served as executive secretary of the branch and as chairman of the Regional Conference of Southern Branches, provided the driving force of the organization. He doubled as a correspondent for the Chicago Defender and the Pittsburgh Courier and was among a handful of prominent southern black leaders who widely publicized their drive for the abolition of segregation and discrimination. LeFlore developed contacts not only with other black organizations but also with members of local offices representing federal agencies. He mastered the art of being conciliatory when necessary yet forceful when provoked in an effort to gain political and economic

advancement for black Mobilians during what many perceived as a period of opportunity.[7]

One of LeFlore's chief projects was the elimination of job discrimination in local defense industries. Yet he did not wage this struggle alone. The FEPC, the Maritime Commission, and the WMC had paid considerable attention to hiring and employment practices in Mobile's largest industry, ADDSCO, since the June 1942 FEPC hearings in Birmingham. Since 1938 the shipyard's workers had been represented by the CIO's Industrial Union of Marine and Shipbuilding Workers of America (IUMSWA). It remained one of the few southern yards where the IUMSWA had won bargaining rights, and with the CIO's moderate policy toward minorities the labor situation there seemed more tolerant of blacks. Very few of the shipyard's 7,000 blacks, however, worked in skilled positions; instead, they served mainly as janitors and helpers, and occasionally in semi-skilled jobs. The ADDSCO management implied that a lack of training for blacks provided the main reason for the dearth of skilled black workmen, but in fact the yard actively imported white skilled workers from other areas while the large number of potential black workmen, many of whom were skilled, languished in menial positions.[8]

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[7]"Some Problems of the Negro in Mobile, October 9, 1942," Surveys Division, Bureau of Intelligence, Office of War Information, Government Reports Records, RG 44; Melton A. McLaurin, "Mobile Blacks and World War II: The Development of a Political Consciousness," in Gulf Coast Politics in the Twentieth Century, ed. Ted Carageorge and Thomas J. Gilliam (Pensacola, 1973), 47-50; Pittsburgh Courier, September 12, 1942.

[8]Herbert Northrup, Organized Labor and the Negro (New York, 1944), 225; Frederic C. Lane, Ships for Victory: A History of Shipbuilding Under the U. S. Maritime Commission in World War II (Baltimore, 1951), 252-53.

On November 19, 1942, as a result of the Birmingham hearings, the FEPC ordered ADDSCO to upgrade and train black workers. ADDSCO responded by increasing the number of blacks on its payroll but did little more. In the meantime the FEPC officials responsible for working on the problem of job discrimination in the South monitored the situation. As 1943 appeared, the manpower shortage in Mobile had grown so acute that the Maritime Commission, whose responsibility included overseeing the production of ships at yards like ADDSCO, and the WMC joined the FEPC in urging the upgrading of black workers. The IUMSWA endorsed this plea, though the white membership at the yard appeared less than enthusiastic about the idea.[9]

On May 3, 1943, Burton R. Morley, area director for the WMC, wrote ADDSCO General Manager John Griser about a plan he and members of other agencies had formulated for training and employing skilled blacks on the shipways. The plan called for two ways to be manned exclusively by blacks, with skilled workers included. Morley added that the WMC "is not in a position to urge that you do assign two ways to colored men, but it does feel that the proposal is a step in the right direction." He concluded by asking Griser to confer with him, representatives of the union, and

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[9]Lawrence M. Cramer to Alabama Shipbuilding and Drydock Corporation, November 19, 1942; "Field Investigation Report, June 8, 1943," in "Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Co.," Series 25, Central Files of the FEPC, Aug. 1941-Apr. 1946, FEPC Records, RG 228; Northrup, Organized Labor, 225-26; Merl A. Reed, "The FEPC, the Black Worker, and the Southern Shipyards," South Atlantic Quarterly, 74 (Autumn 1975), 454-55. The union leadership accepted the use of black skilled workers as a matter of practicality in employing all available sources of manpower. Many white union members, however, proved hostile to the prospect and apparently triggered considerable friction within the union's local membership.

other groups before actually implementing the plan.[10]

Days passed without a response. Irked, Morley wrote Griser again on May 20, reminding him that "we did ask that you let us know if it were to be done," and wondered "if the Company has reached a decision in the matter." In a curt reply, ADDSCO informed Morley on May 22 that the shipyard planned to place black welders with whites on four ways at its Pinto Island yard beginning May 24. This contradicted Morley's original proposal, and it involved the risk of reprisals if the white workers objected to skilled blacks in their midst. Furthermore, ADDSCO did not announce the forthcoming change, so when twelve black welders appeared on the graveyard shift, they came as a complete surprise to the whites.[11]

The next morning, May 25, the shift changed, and the welders were replaced by other blacks. Word spread across the yard as daylight exposed what had happened, and grumbling began. At about 9:30 a.m. violence erupted. Rather than the black welders themselves being the victims, the janitors and helpers who ordinarily flocked around the hulls found themselves being beaten and chased. Since this part of the shipyard lay on an island, the blacks did not have the opportunity to run away. Instead, the drawbridge, tunnel, and ferryboat system connecting the island with the other part of ADDSCO's operation on the mainland afforded the only means of escape as 500 to 1,000 whites struck at fleeing blacks with pipes, tools, and fists.

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[10]Morley to Griser, May 3, 1943, in "Monthly Mopac Area Reports: Labor Mobilization and Utilization, Women, Alabama," Series 11, WMC Records, RG 211.

[11]Morley to Griser, May 20, 1943; B. C. Knerr to Morley, May 22, 1943, ibid.

In many cases, such as that of Alice Gamble, workers knew nothing of the riot until black people began streaming past their work areas. Mrs. Gamble stood gawking at the sight when a white man struck her in the back and warned, "get going, nigger. This is our shipyard." L. T. Welch, working in an engine room on one of the hulls, knew nothing until he clambered to the ground and heard the command, "nigger, jar the ground"; someone smashed a board across his face for good measure. Zenith Dock experienced the full force of the affray. While Dock was busily engaged in his duties as a chipper, a group of whites pounced on him and beat him senseless. A white foreman intervened and saved his life.[12]

Others shared similar vicissitudes as they fled from their attackers. A good many blacks, seeing what was happening, managed to escape without being injured. Thomas Johnson, for example, saw eight or ten whites chasing a black man, then another group beating a black woman. Without investigating further, he fled with a trail of flying objects close behind. During the episode about fifty blacks received injuries. Reports of blacks being thrown into the Mobile River and drowned circulated widely, but no one could substantiate them. The riot ended only when law enforcement officials arrived, and ADDSCO sent the black employees home, leaving the whites in the yard.

As soon as word reached the city and state governments that the riot had broken out, members of various groups rapidly converged on the scene. Police Chief Dudley McFayden and Sheriff William Holcombe mobilized their scanty forces to assist the beleaguered blacks in getting out of the yard. Apparently the yard police either stood by or participated in

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[12]"Field Investigation Report, June 8, 1943," FEPC Records, RG 228.

chasing blacks, so they proved worthless in containing the violence. The state police sent in about forty officers, but they were inadequate as a protective force even when coupled with the 140 city and county authorities. Since the violence endangered government property, Governor Chauncey Sparks issued orders to Lieutenant Colonel Robert Joerg of the Alabama State Guard at 10:30 a.m., and within a short time five companies had embarked for the area from Andalusia, Montgomery, and Tuscaloosa to reinforce the Mobile contingent. This represented an increase in the force of about 200 men. Officials also called in federal troops from Brookley Field, while the small Coast Guard unit in Mobile began plying the waters between Pinto Island and town, prepared to board the ferries if trouble developed.[13]

By noon the riot had ended, and over 400 enforcement officers were on hand in the shipyard. The troops from Brookley Field erected signs reading: "United States troops are here to protect government property and to see that there is no interference with the war effort." They remained as conspicuous as possible, even though no blacks dared return to the yard. To keep tempers from flaring anew, an AFL official issued a statement telling all black AFL-affiliated workers in other parts of the city to go home for the time being. The city closed all liquor stores in Mobile and Baldwin counties and shut down all bars until the crisis passed.

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[13]"Confidential Survey Report on Manpower Utilization at Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Corporation, Mobile, Alabama," in "Manpower Utilization Report--Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Corp., Mobile, Alabama," Series 21, Regional and State Office Manpower Utilization and Occupational Analyses, Reports, and Case Histories, 1943-1945, WMC Records, RG 211; "Report on Riot Duty, Mobile, Alabama, June 10, 1943," in "Report--Riot Duty Mobile, 1942-45," Records of the Office of the Provost Marshal General, Record Group 389, National Archives (hereafter cited as Provost Marshal General Records, RG 389); Mobile Register, May 26, 1943.

Most officials recognized the intensity of local tension and took these protective steps to avoid a repetition of the Pinto Island riot elsewhere. Clearly, an affray not geographically restricted to an island could assume much more serious proportions.

Governor Sparks sent two representatives to Mobile with the authority of the governor's office to act as coordinators in maintaining stability. D. R. Dunlap, President of ADDSCO, issued an ameliorative statement saying that "arrangements have been made to guard the yards with an ample force and military personnel if necessary. No further trouble is expected." Meanwhile, Charles Hansen of the IUMSWA complained that the riot "was wholly unnecessary. We claim there were some agitators out to sabotage the war effort. All I can say is that it was a great day for Hitler and the Mikado." Finally, two city commissioners issued a frantic appeal intended to assuage feelings, directing Mobilians to "go about your business unexcited, remain calm on the home front and refuse to join crowds that try to congregate about the streets or in public places." Several sources urged the governor to declare martial law but he declined.[14]

Although in the immediate wake of the violence utter confusion prevailed, by the next day various offices and agencies began to collect themselves. At ADDSCO work continued but at a slackened pace, since none of the yard's black workers returned. In fact, within a few days the local office of the WMC received applications from about 1,000 black employees asking for release from their jobs and transfer to other locations.

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[14]Mobile Register, May 26, 1943; New York Times, May 26, 1943, p. 25.

One angry citizen capsuled the mood of many black Mobilians when he complained that "it's pitiful to see what we colored workers have to go through with in Mobile. We colored workers are buying bonds, paying victory tax, income tax, and taking all kinds of chances with our lives"; but, the shipyard worker concluded, violence seemed to be the only reward.[15]

John LeFlore of the NAACP busied himself during the immediate aftermath of the riot by taking depositions from injured blacks and assisting the efforts of two FEPC field investigators, Clarence Mitchell and Ernest Trimble. This inquiry lasted from May 27 through May 31, and during that period the agents held meetings with a variety of prominent black leaders as well as with victims of the violence. At the same time Franklin O. Nichols of the National Urban League undertook his own investigation in much the same manner as did the FEPC officials. He spent a week in Mobile talking with black citizens and with representatives of management, labor and the federal agencies involved. In a summary to the national office he assigned a large share of the blame for the violence to ADDSCO, noting that the management should have been aware of heightened tension and acted accordingly. Dismissing subversive influence as a cause of the outbreak, Nichols noted that a conspiracy by some reactionary organization like the League to Maintain White Supremacy could have been responsible, but

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[15]Anonymous letter to "News Editor of the Pittsburgh Courier," May 28, 1943, in "Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Co.," Series 25, FEPC Records, RG 228; Press release, May 27, 1943, in "Speeches by Members of Regional Office Staff and Other Material: Negro Manpower--Inactive File--FEPC," Series 17, Speeches by Members of Regional Office Staff and Other Materials, WMC Records, RG 211.

certainly no alien influence was at work. Other investigations came to similar conclusions, though the rationales varied somewhat.[16]

While inquiries continued the FEPC, Maritime Commission, WMC, and IUMSWA frantically sought both stability and a solution to the problems that had caused the riot.[17] The first action from the WMC's office came on May 26 when in a less than cordial letter to ADDSCO, Burton Morley disclaimed responsibility for the riot. "Since this office was not consulted at all in regard to the present proposal," he complained, "I think it only fair to say that the responsibility for its adoption rests entirely with the Company." Having absolved himself and the WMC of complicity, Morley proceeded to cooperate with ADDSCO in trying to rectify the situation. That same day blacks met under police protection and with the city's permission in a mass meeting to discuss the prospects of getting back to work. Speaking for ADDSCO, C. Y. Hall of the personnel department assured the workers that the situation had calmed considerably. Police Chief McFayden also spoke, emphasizing that the police would continue to protect them. The general consensus reflected a desire to get back to work.[18]

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[16]"Field Investigation Report, June 8, 1943," FEPC Records, RG 228; Guichard Parris and Lester Brooks, Blacks in the City: A History of the National Urban League (Boston, 1971), 298; "Summary of a Report on the Race Riots in the Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Company Yards in Mobile, Alabama," in "Mobile, Alabama, Riot, 1943 (Report)," Papers of the National Urban League, Series I, Box 34, Library of Congress (hereafter cited as Urban League Papers). The League to Maintain White Supremacy was a Birmingham-based organization created in 1942 to oppose the equal opportunity efforts of the FEPC and other federal agencies. Its activities were confined to Alabama.

[17]On May 27 the President issued Executive Order 9346 which created a new FEPC as an independent agency within the Office of Production Management. Its new head was Monsignor Francis J. Haas. The new committee received its baptism quickly in dealing with the Mobile incident of the 25th. Ruchames, Race, Jobs, and Politics, 56, 58-59.

[18]Mobile Register, May 27, 28, 1943.

On the 27th when a number of blacks reported for work, several hundred whites walked out of the yard. Hostility had apparently not subsided, and likely only the presence of federal and state troops prevented another outbreak. Having already lost over 160,000 manhours to the violence, officials shuddered at the thought of more disruptions.[19] Accordingly, on May 28 representatives of the WMC, FEPC, Maritime Commission, and Navy met to discuss a solution that ADDSCO might find acceptable. This meeting featured a discussion of the riot and its causes and then some bandying about of ideas to alleviate the problem. Captain W. K. Graham of the Maritime Commission commented that in his opinion whites simply would not accept skilled black workers "even if they are 10 miles away." The discussion then degenerated into a squabble over authority and jurisdiction, so nothing of substance emerged.[20]

That afternoon federal officials met with representatives of the shipyard and union. Captain Graham, John Griser, and Burton Morley joined Charles Hansen of the IUMSWA and FEPC investigators Clarence Mitchell and Ernest Trimble, among others. Graham, presiding, reviewed the various suggestions and noted that he personally favored Hansen's proposal to remove the black welders until an educational program for the whites could be completed. The FEPC representatives protested that there was no time for such a program, that ADDSCO had had since late 1942 to develop a program, and that the FEPC would insist on immediate upgrading of the blacks.

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[19]Morley to Griser, May 26, 1943, in "Monthly Mopac Area Reports: Labor Mobilization and Utilization, Women, Alabama," Series 11; Press release, May 27, 1943, WMC Records, RG 211.

[20]Mobile Register, May 28, 1943; "Field Investigation Report, June 8, 1943," FEPC Records, RG 228.

Morley, on the other hand, wanted segregated shipways where blacks would completely man a certain number of the ways and whites exclusively man the others. Griser objected, complaining that such a project was impractical. Yet, he admitted, if the company pulled the welders off the ways and an educational program were started, the whites who had opposed the promotion of blacks would interpret this as a victory. When skilled workers were reintroduced in the future, therefore, the same thing that occurred on May 25 might happen again.

Realizing that the FEPC was not going to retreat from its stance, Griser then proposed that a mass meeting be held without delay to announce a plan of segregating the four ways at the north end of the yard. These ways lay isolated from the other construction areas, so that if the plan were implemented skilled black workmen could be employed without risking further white reprisals. This in effect represented a compromise position, for it would not constitute integration. Griser asked the FEPC to "close its eyes" to this technicality, for skilled blacks would still be used in ship construction in accordance with FEPC wishes. To underscore the necessity of prompt action, Graham stressed that the White House "did not want any back-tracking" on the issue of skilled blacks on the ways and wanted the matter cleared up as soon as possible. After more discussion involving technicalities, the committee drafted a proposal embodying the four-shipway solution for Washington's approval. The meeting then adjourned, having lasted six hours.[21]

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[21]Mobile Register, May 28, 1943; "Field Investigation Report, June 8, 1943," FEPC Records, RG 228; "Report on the Situation at Alabama Drydock and Shipbuilding Company," in "Monthly Mopac Area Reports: Labor Mobilization and Utilization, Women, Alabama," Series 11, WMC Records, RG 211; Reed, "Black Worker and Southern Shipyards," 456-57.

On May 29 the FEPC investigators met with R. B. Chandler of the Mobile Register and received from him a pledge of full cooperation. In fact, Chandler had, since the 26th, run editorials that castigated the rioters, implored the rumormongers to stop aiding Hitler, and criticized local judges for not fining more heavily a variety of persons charged with misdemeanors in connection with the riot or with failing to obey the "move on" ordinance recently passed by the city to avoid loitering near the shipyard. For this last act a judge cited Chandler for contempt of court.[22] It was Chandler's hard-hitting editorials that helped bring many people back to their senses, especially when on May 29 he offered $1,000 to anyone who could prove that any deaths had occurred during the riot. "Rumors and lies, spread by idle tongues and empty heads, continue to whiz over the telephone wires, across the back fences and up and down the streets," he charged. His paper was putting up the money as a reward "to anyone who can present proof . . . that a single person was killed in the racial conflict," and he stood confident "that this reward will never be collected because the rumors . . . have been thoroughly investigated."[23]

The next day, May 30, the mass meeting at ADDSCO took place. Some 300 or 400 workers heard pleas and assurances from Colonel Joerg of the State Guard, Franklin Nichols of the Urban League, John LeFlore of the NAACP, Charles Hansen of the union, and Clarence Mitchell of the FEPC,

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[22]"Field Investigation Report, June 8, 1943," FEPC Records, RG 228; Mobile Register, May 26-31, 1943. Chandler refused to apologize to Judge Tisdale J. Touart, so in mid-June Touart fined him $10 and sentenced him to six hours in jail as a mild rebuke.

[23]Mobile Register, May 29, 1943; June 8, 1943; Pittsburgh Courier, June 19, 1943.

among others. A show of hands revealed that most workers wanted to get back to their jobs.[24]

The text of the segregation agreement, however, was not made public either to the workers or to anyone else while officials awaited approval from Washington. This caused considerable acrimony among the shipyard's management, WMC, and the Maritime Commission, the last of which for some reason remained adamant about maintaining secrecy. On June 2 approval came. In a confidential telegram to John Griser, FEPC chairman Francis J. Haas agreed to the proposal to segregate four shipways as "a practical settlement of the existing situation." Haas couched the approval in terms which made it clear that the FEPC expected ADDSCO to employ blacks in all skilled positions and not simply stop at the minimum requirements. But the proposal even then remained shrouded in secrecy. Some authorities charged that ADDSCO did not want the workers to know that the agreement had not kept the full spirit of the FEPC's original wishes, while the WMC complained that Captain Graham wanted the agreement kept secret until the workers had somehow been informed. Of course, the latter had become restless since everyone knew an agreement had been reached but no one gave out details.[25]

In a June 4 press release the War Manpower Commission unexpectedly disclosed the outlines of the agreement which naturally came over the wires to Mobile and ended up in the Register. ADDSCO officials, incensed

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[24]Baltimore Afro-American, June 5, 1943; "Field Investigation Report, June 8, 1943," FEPC Records, RG 228.

[25]"Report on the Situation at Alabama Drydock and Shipbuilding Company," WMC Records, RG 211; Haas to Griser, June 2, 1943, in "Negro Problems--Mobile," Series 28, FEPC Records, RG 228; New York Times, June 13, 1943, p. 34.

at this move, issued a bulletin that same day which, incredibly, forbade employees, whether on or off the job, from reading any newspaper except the company's publication, Fore and Aft. "You are paid by the United States to bend every effort to win the war and there is no excuse whatever for defrauding the government in this manner," the bulletin charged. This outrageous order naturally heightened interest in discovering the details of the proposal to solve the yard's racial problems. Finally, on June 8 the Office of War Information (OWI) released the full text of the ADDSCO-FEPC agreement, but instead of renewing tension the shipyard's workers promptly accepted the proposal and returned to their jobs.[26]

In the meantime city and state officials and the White House were inundated with protests. Everyone, it seems, proved ready to wag an accusing finger, but no one accepted the responsibility. Mobile police eventually booked three whites on felony charges, two for assault with intent to murder and the other for complicity in inciting the riot. Aside from this and the fining of a few others, Mobile's law officers failed to take responsibility for seeking out the guilty and meting out punishment. In a variety of official and unofficial investigations, the blame was directed at ADDSCO, the FEPC, the union, subversive influence, or congested conditions. Assigning blame, however, did not alter the fact that a race riot had occurred or that segregation had been approved by the

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[26]Tennie Dejarnette to Morley, June 4, 1943; Undated memorandum by Harvey Allen, in "Speeches by Members of Regional Office Staff and Other Material: Negro Manpower--Inactive File--FEPC," Series 17, WMC Records, RG 211; New York Times, June 13, 1943, p. 34; Mobile Register, June 8, 1943.

federal agency created in part to oversee equal employment opportunities for blacks.[27]

John LeFlore led the protestors in a telegram to Francis J. Haas. "Your letter June seventh keenly disappoints in that you indicate approval of plan meaning little or nothing toward providing equal opportunity," he complained, adding sarcastically that acceptance of the proposal "obviously shows a different policy than the . . . Committee when composed of former members." The NAACP called on Haas and WMC head Paul V. McNutt to revoke the agreement, maintaining that any such compromise "would be disastrous at this stage of the war." The Pittsburgh Courier, upset over the dangerous precedent that the FEPC had set, charged that the "four jim-crow" shipways constituted a surrender "to the Nazi racial theory and another defeat for the principle embodied in the Declaration of Independence." The segregation proposal limited the number of skilled positions to approximately two hundred, as well as the type of skilled work required, chiefly welding and shipfitting, because only bare hull construction was slated for the all-black ways. Interior and superstructure construction would be done elsewhere. "Here is proof," reproved the Courier, "that segregation ALWAYS means discrimination."[28]

Haas replied to this storm of criticism by meekly observing that "the committee cannot give its approval to the complete segregation of

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[27]Mobile Register, May 28, 1943; Pittsburgh Courier, June 19, 1943; July 31, 1943; Birmingham World, June 8, 1943.

[28]LeFlore to Haas, June 11, 1943, in "Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Co.," Series 25; G. F. Floyd to John A. Davis, February 10, 1944, in "Negro Problems--Mobile," Series 28, FEPC Records, RG 228; "Along the NAACP Battlefront," Crisis, 50 (July 1943), 212; Pittsburgh Courier, June 19, 1943.

Negroes' four ways and does not consider that as a precedent." The fact remained, however, that despite an overall increase in the number of skilled blacks from none to about two hundred, the foremost federal agency in the realm of equal job opportunities had approved a proposal which did not square with its enunciated aims. The FEPC had simply bowed to local pressure and in so doing lost a measure of respectability.[29]

On June 5 Governor Sparks relieved the seven state guard companies, and five days later, over the objections of John LeFlore, the federal troops moved back to Brookley Field. As far as the state was concerned, the danger had passed, and the shipyard's activities returned to normal. The term "normal," however, meant the bustle and congestion of an essentially abnormal era. Within three weeks after the May 25 disturbance, ADDSCO was clamoring for 5,200 additional workers in an area unable to serve those who had already migrated to the city.[30]

ADDSCO had the last word on the segregation proposal. The north end of the shipyard, where blacks had been relegated in the controversial decision of May 28, never contained four full ways. In early 1944 the FEPC learned that the "four shipways" consisted in reality of two full ways and two half ways. Because of the difficulties encountered in constructing stern sections on the half ways and full hulls on the others,

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[29]Statement by Haas, July 8, 1943, in "Speeches by Members of Regional Office Staff and Other Material: Negro Manpower--Inactive File--FEPC," Series 17, WMC Records, RG 211.

[30]"Report on Riot Duty, Mobile, Alabama, June 10, 1943," Provost Marshal General Records, RG 389; Boyte Austin Presnell, "The Impact of World War II on Race Relations in Mobile, Alabama, 1940-1948" (M. A. Thesis, Atlanta University, 1972), 14; LeFlore to Brig. Gen. James A. Mollison, June 10, 1943, in Papers of the Mobile Branch, NAACP, University of South Alabama Library, Mobile; "Estimate of In-Migration into the Mobile, Alabama Labor Market Area During the Six Months Beginning June 1, 1943," in "In-Migration--Alabama, Mobile," Series 12, WMC Records, RG 211.

construction moved slowly. Griser placed the blame for this problem on the black workers and not on the shipway arrangement. Yet the FEPC could do little about the situation. The black press, disgusted at the news, accused ADDSCO of reneging on its agreement, but the complaints fell on deaf ears.[31]

An ironic footnote to the Mobile story occurred during the last week in May 1944, a full year after the riot. Black workers established an ADDSCO record when they completed the tanker S. S. Tule Canyon in 79 days, and in disgust a number of white workers quit their jobs. Rumors of another riot floated across the area since blacks had bettered the white record, and ADDSCO alerted Brookley Field and state forces in the fear that one might materialize. It did not, but tension lingered in the shipyard. Mobile had not seen the end of interracial violence.[32]

As events were to prove, the Mobile riot began the storm of outbreaks that enveloped the South and much of the rest of the nation during the summer of 1943. The foreboding clouds had begun to build up in 1940, and the next two years witnessed isolated yet significant incidents. Conditions in Mobile were replicated in dozens of other production centers, and by May, though few saw it coming, widespread and destructive discord proved inevitable on both the civilian and military scenes. Blacks had not only begun to achieve a modicum of economic advancement but they had

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[31]"Confidential Survey Report on Manpower Utilization at Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Corporation, Mobile, Alabama," WMC Records, RG 211; "The Industrial Front: Employment," Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations, 1 (February-March 1944), 3-4; Davis to Malcolm Ross, February 18, 1944, in "Negro Problems--Mobile," Series 28, FEPC Records, RG 228.

[32]Chicago Defender, June 19, 1944.

also grown more assertive in their demands for equal opportunity and, whether southern or northern, had actively pointed up the difference between the nation's enunciated aims of liberating the oppressed overseas while tolerating racial oppression at home. The Mobile riot sparked a violent period in which whites would attempt to disabuse southern blacks of any notions concerning equality. The spectre of a nation torn by internal strife came close to reality as the summer progressed and as the experience of Mobile was repeated in more destructive fashion in both large and small cities.

The Mobile riot illustrated not only white intolerance but also the fumbling actions of the federal government in trying to keep control of a volatile situation. The FEPC, WMC, and others lacked the fortitude necessary to effect permanent gains for blacks, apparently out of fear that such changes might spark violence of catastrophic proportions. Instead, the federal agencies involved seemed to prefer temporary solutions as a way of ridding themselves of complex problems. Admittedly, the FEPC did not possess the clout it needed to enforce permanent solutions, but it, along with other governmental representatives, surrendered to segregation and in effect subverted the quality of human life to the production of war goods. Perhaps the situation was really too critical to try to effect permanent changes for southern blacks, but, more to the point, the FEPC and the others failed to press for even moderate advances when the opportunity to do so appeared.

The chief question in the wake of the Mobile riot was not why it occurred, but why it was not more destructive and why the incident was not duplicated again and again in the city during the war. Perhaps the

physical restriction of Pinto Island prevented the violence from spilling into other sections. Violence did continue in Mobile, producing the Brookley Field riot of 1944. Yet in the final analysis the situation could have been much worse. Conditions prevailing in Mobile could have spawned a series of incidents that might have disrupted the city from mid-1943 to the end of the war. That this did not occur was largely due to the strong and effective leadership of men like R. B. Chandler, who risked being sent to jail in order to help stifle dangerous rumors, militate for strong legal action, and defuse a volatile situation. Other areas, however, took up where Mobile left off during the long summer of 1943.

CHAPTER V

"THERE EXISTS A DANGER"

In the immediate aftermath of the Mobile riot a number of racial clashes occurred in and around military camps in the South and across the nation. These incidents reflected the same causal patterns as civilian violence in that they occurred largely in response to extremely tense conditions created by the war effort. The summer of 1943 provided the most intense violence of the war era in both the civilian and military spheres, as each fed on the other to form a general situation of crumbling race relations. Civilian violence emanated from the determination of southern whites to reverse the advancement of blacks and to stop the growth of black assertiveness which had become increasingly evident and presumably dangerous since 1940. In military violence, however, another aspect of the same general problem emerged. Black soldiers, especially those stationed in the South, reached the brink of impatience in response to steadily worsening conditions. As the cutting edge of racial militance, they led the assault against the "savage ideal." Military racial violence during mid-1943, then, proved to be another outgrowth of the overall tension which threatened to disrupt the American war effort.

Military violence emerged from a variety of causes, not the least of which was the War Department's "hydra-headed racism" that sprang from ignorance of and insensitivity toward the special problems black GIs faced. On the one hand, it assumed black inferiority, at least in soldiering, responsibility, discipline, and command. This produced a general assessment that since blacks did not make good soldiers they

should not be utilized as combat troops, but instead, most should serve in non-combatant roles. On the other hand, the War Department expected blacks to perform equally with whites and at the same time to accept implicit and explicit discrimination. For blacks to perform on the same level with whites, therefore, demanded that they ignore prejudice, racism, inferior training, hostile white officers, stationing in southern camps where traditional racial mores held sway, and the Army's attitude that blacks could not succeed because of their inferiority. Although the War Department realized the need for black manpower, it minimized the role of black troops, and the black soldiers knew it. In their estimation, each instance of white civilian violence attracted little more than passing glances from the Army, despite the efforts of William Hastie, Truman Gibson, Benjamin O. Davis, and a handful of others to make black soldiers believe they constituted an important element in the war effort. When mutinies began to erupt in 1943, however, the Army reacted with great alacrity to such an internal threat, and invariably placed the blame for such incidents solely on blacks' shoulders. By 1943 black GIs increasingly took matters into their own hands, and while they intended their protests to show their dissatisfaction with discrimination, in the estimation of the War Department it only reinforced the negative view of black troops.

Revenge against racism formed part of the explanation for the mutinies of the war era but not all of it. In some cases blacks reacted with violence almost as if it constituted the only recourse; in reality, more peaceable measures might have effected changes. The perpetrators of the mutinies cannot be absolved of responsibility. Yet the War

Department chose to stereotype black soldiers as troublemakers and in the process did the vast majority of them an injustice. Desperation among many blacks in the military seemed to provide the key to explaining the upsurge of mutinous conduct during and after mid-1943. Such incidents as the Raymond Carr and Thomas Foster shootings, the Fayetteville and Alexandria riots, and the innumerable acts of degradation against blacks propelled many to resort to violence in utter desperation. For them violence did not embody radicalism; it represented a struggle for self-respect and even survival. Whites, however, including many in the War Department, saw such violence as a distinct threat to the war effort. Southern whites, moreover, believed that mutinies endangered not only the war effort but also the color line, contradicting the ingrained notion of black passivity and inferiority. Once again, two separate and alien perceptions of the same problem prevailed along racial lines.

The disorders of mid-1943 and afterward differed from those of the preceding war years. As the nation's race relations deteriorated, military violence proved more likely to involve larger numbers of men. It also tended to occur more in the camps themselves than in nearby towns. The violence and its aftermath reflected not only the breaking point of black GIs toward the southern racial system but also the end of the War Department's passivity as it watched military violence escalate. Courts-martial resulted though they had been used rarely for such incidents earlier in the war. The most important and telling difference, however, was that black soldiers were more likely to be the aggressors; in many cases they reached the point where violent outbursts seemed the only

recourse against real or perceived oppressive conditions.[1]

Black aggression in military violence during the twentieth century had few precedents. Until recently the Brownsville raid of August 1906 appeared to be a matter of black military aggression against the racial oppression forced upon them by white Texans. Even though recent scholarship on the subject has absolved the 25th Infantry Regiment (Colored) of complicity in the raid, the conditions it underwent at Fort Brown proved similar to the situation in southern camps during World War II. The Houston affray of August 1917 proved a clearer example of black military violence against blatantly oppressive conditions. Men of the 24th Infantry Regiment (Colored) descended upon downtown Houston in retaliation against a series of incidents that had driven them to despair. Eventually sixty-three men faced court-martial, and the War Department executed thirteen of them on the basis of a controversial trial and review.[2]

The same tragic situation recurred during World War II from the spring and summer of 1943 through 1944. These incidents did not command the publicity given the Brownsville and Houston episodes, because the nation's eyes were riveted on the international scene; no isolated incident emerged to attract people's undivided attention. During mid-1943, scores of military-related racial incidents erupted from the Atlantic to the Pacific, most of them in the South. From May through July the riots in Camp Van Dorn, Camp Stewart, and near Camp McCain graphically illustrated the despair black GIs displayed.

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[1]Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, 366.

[2]See Weaver, The Brownsville Raid, and Haynes, A Night of Violence.

The military violence of the preceding years, the Gurdon incident, the Alexandria riot, and the Raymond Carr case, had aroused considerable attention. Unfortunately, the War Department expressed little interest. Concerned whites and blacks saw the dangers that lay ahead, and no one was in so unique a position to perceive these dangers as the former civilian aide to the Secretary of War, William H. Hastie. On May 29, 1943, Hastie reported to the National Lawyers Guild that "civilian violence against the Negro in uniform is a recurrent phenomenon. It may well be the greatest single factor now operating to make 13,000,000 Negroes bitter and resentful." Hastie also pointed out that the Army "is aggressively engaged in teaching our soldiers how to treat people abroad--the people of India, the South Sea Islanders, the Arabs, every one but their own fellow American soldiers," and he warned that "there is no reason to believe that the 1943 record will be any better."[3]

Hastie's report presaged the resumption of violence in the military by only one day, for on May 30 discord erupted at Camp Van Dorn, Mississippi. The camp lay near the small town of Centreville in the extreme southwestern section of the state, cradled to the west and south by Louisiana. Designed to house and train a division, about 6,500 black troops formed part of Van Dorn's complement. Among the black units was the 364th Infantry Regiment, activated in March 1941. The regiment had a history of trouble, beginning with its initial training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Though its members were chafing to go overseas, the 364th

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[3]William H. Hastie, "A Report on Civilian Violence Against Negro Soldiers, Submitted to the National Executive Board of the National Lawyers Guild, May 29, 1943," in "Judge Hastie," LF, NAACP Papers.

bounced around the country. While stationed at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, in May 1942, local officials charged three of its members with raping a white woman. A court-martial convicted them and sentenced them to death. Although the sentences were later commuted, the storm of protest surrounding the case and the corresponding publicity inflamed the feelings of many 364th soldiers. In November 1942, while at Papago Park in Phoenix, Arizona, soldiers of the 364th got into a fight with a group of black MPs, resulting in three deaths and fifteen injuries. The regiment then received a new commander and executive officer. In May 1943, in a move that the men of the 364th considered as punishment for their past record, the Army sent the unit to Camp Van Dorn for retraining in preparation for overseas duty. By this time the unit had developed a negative attitude, and the War Department correctly regarded it as a problem outfit.[4]

The 364th arrived at Camp Van Dorn in two separate contingents, the first on May 26, the second on the 28th. Immediately the men looked with disdain upon their new assignment. Centreville contained only 1,200 people, and the nearest cities were forty or fifty miles away. The area lacked adequate recreational facilities, and prevailing segregation patterns both on and off base consigned blacks to the worst areas. As soon as the troops began to arrive, trouble developed. Some of the men reportedly bragged about how they were going to "take over" the camp, Centreville,

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[4]John Ray Skates, Jr., "World War II and its Effects, 1940-1948," in A History of Mississippi, vol. 2, ed. Richard Aubrey McLemore (Hattiesburg, 1973), 122; Motley, Invisible Soldier, 60; Capt. Elmer P. Gibson to Truman K. Gibson, Jr., July 14, 1943, in "Camp Van Dorn, Miss.," CASW Records, RG 107; Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, 366-67; Pittsburgh Courier, June 12, 1943; September 5, 1943; October 23, 1943.

and the whole state. This kind of talk understandably alarmed the inhabitants of the town as well as other troops at Van Dorn.

On May 27, a day after the arrival of the first contingent, members of the 364th invaded the jim crow service club and rendered themselves obnoxious by refusing to remove their hats, wearing their uniforms in illegal fashion, swearing, and drinking beer. The next night a group from the 364th broke into the post exchange and ransacked it, causing several hundred dollars damage. The exchange had been temporarily closed because of previous interracial difficulties, and the troops apparently retaliated by breaking in. On the night of May 29, members of the 364th drifted through Centreville cursing the townspeople, and MPs escorted them back to camp. From an administrative point of view, these incidents reflected the reprehensible actions of a group of misfits, while from the soldiers' point of view they served notice that blacks would no longer accept suffocating degradation as long as they were in uniform. They apparently thought that the only way to get the attention of higher-ups was to act in a boisterous manner.[5]

The breaking point for the 364th came on Sunday, May 30. Late that afternoon a group of about seven soldiers from that unit went AWOL. The men were walking along Highway 24 toward Centreville when two white MPs drove by in a jeep. Sergeant Charles Hix, one of the MPs, upbraided the blacks for their sloppy attire, ordering several of them to put on their ties and otherwise straighten up; he then ordered Private William

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[5]Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, 368; Memorandum, Maj. Gen. Virgil L. Peterson to the Deputy Chief of Staff, June 8, 1943, in "Violence Against Negro Military Personnel," CASW Records, RG 107.

Walker to roll down his sleeves and button them, but Walker refused, saying "I don't think I have to." Hix repeated his order, and once again Walker refused to comply. The MP then reached for his billy club and started to get out of the jeep, later recalling that "I was either going to make him straighten his uniform or arrest him." Walker realized that he was in for a beating, so he punched Hix in the mouth and grappled with him in the jeep. The other MP alighted from the jeep but was restrained from aiding Hix by the other blacks who asked him to let them fight it out. Hix, receiving the worst end of the fight, admonished the other MP to "shoot this damned nigger," but he did not intervene.

About one hundred yards down the road, Sheriff Richard Whitaker, Chief of Police R. J. Knighton, and a deputy sat in their car talking. They noticed the scuffle and decided to investigate. Whitaker offhandedly remarked that "it looks like some drunk, I guess." When they arrived on the scene, Knighton drew his gun and ordered Walker to get out of the jeep. He complied but then started toward Whitaker who waited until the soldier was two or three steps away and then shot him. After loading the dead man into the jeep and transferring him back to camp, Hix reportedly bragged, "I just got me another nigger and now I reckon I get my transfer." The other MP replied, "you ought to get a gold medal for that."[6]

As word spread around camp, tempers began to flare. The 364th's commander, Colonel John F. Goodman, quickly realized the gravity of the situation, especially in light of past events. He immediately ordered

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[6]Testimony of R. Whitaker, R. J. Knighton, Sgt. Charles E. Hix, Pvt. Leslie H. Milburne, Pvt. Arthur L. Owens, and Pvt. Morgan Franklin, June 1, 1943, in "Violence Against Negro Military Personnel," CASW Records, RG 107.

all company commanders to keep a close rein on their respective units and then went to the barracks of Company A, Walker's unit. He found the company in an uproar, with men milling around and threatening to break into the supply room. Goodman ordered the firing pins removed from all rifles in the supply room and a strengthened guard stationed there. While he tried to calm the men of Company A, a group from Company C stormed the supply room before the firing pins could be removed. These men, along with several hundred others, gathered and threatened a general outbreak. A detachment of black MPs arrived and were ordered to fire into the crowd in an attempt to stand them off. Only one man was wounded. Goodman and the regimental chaplain, Captain Elmer Gibson, rushed to the scene and through their presence averted open rebellion. Goodman's high reputation among the men proved itself, and his pleas calmed them down. The soldiers returned to their barracks and were confined to the camp.[7]

Thoroughly alarmed, whites armed in preparation for a bloodbath, while the Inspector General of the Army, Virgil L. Peterson, ordered a complete investigation. The War Department recognized this instance of black aggression as a dangerous development, so it determined to take more severe action than it had in earlier incidents. While the investigation progressed, white Mississippians complained. The townspeople of Centreville agreed that the 364th and perhaps all black soldiers should be removed from the South without delay. The War Department assured Senator James O. Eastland that the situation was under control and that "the worst possible solution of this problem would be to transfer this organization to another

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[7]Peterson to Deputy Chief of Staff, June 8, 1943, ibid.

station" as the senator requested. The 364th would not cause further trouble since "a training program is being prescribed for this organization which will keep the men exceedingly busy." A white citizen of Drew, Mississippi, complained to Secretary of State Cordell Hull that "the negro soldiers stationed in Mississippi have been raping our women and murdering our men" and that "the only safe course for us to pursue is to secede again from the United States and join Mexico." This individual concluded by advising Hull that "when the North gets ready for another Civil War--give the negro the vote in the South."[8]

On June 8 the Inspector General in a memorandum to the Deputy Chief of Staff revealed the results of the investigation. The action of the 364th was technically a mutiny. This brought the incident clearly within the jurisdiction of the War Department, unlike previous incidents of white civilian aggression against black soldiers. Yet General Peterson assumed in his recommendations that the blacks generated the Camp Van Dorn discord by themselves, ignoring injustices by whites. Because of this assumption and the fact that Peterson could punish no one outside the military establishment, he made the unusual recommendation that the 364th be placed "in such a disciplinary state that it will make known the remaining ringleaders and trouble-makers within the unit." Such action, he concluded "will bring home to other colored organizations where unrest is prevalent and mutinous conduct is smouldering that the Army is prepared to take vigorous disciplinary action to suppress such conduct."[9]

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[8] Ibid.; Lt. Gen. Joseph T. McNarney to James O. Eastland, June 9, 1943; R. R. Green to Cordell Hull, June 10, 1943, AG 291.2, RG 407; Pittsburgh Courier, July 10, 1943.

[9] Peterson to Deputy Chief of Staff, June 8, 1943, CASW Records, RG 107.

Hearing of this report, Truman Gibson, the acting civilian aide to the Secretary of War, lodged a complaint with the department. Gibson naturally sided with the Inspector General in his condemnation of the 364th's mutinous action and in the punishment meted out, but he strongly disagreed with the implication that blacks in the Army were generally mutinous and unruly. "Despite the very high regard and respect I have for the Inspector General," Gibson observed, "I wish to respectfully disagree with his sentiments, particularly because they represent, perhaps, the majority opinion in the Army." Harsh and repressive measures constituted no solution to a very complicated problem. "Such an approach assumes that Negroes are primarily to blame for all disturbances," an attitude that Gibson did not share. Black troops were on the one hand being trained as combat soldiers, he declared, while on the other hand "they are generally told to 'remain in their places' in the South. This warning has a meaning bitterly clear to most Negroes." Blacks would no sooner accept discriminatory treatment than would any other group.[10]

As soon as the men of the 364th realized their punishment would keep them in Mississippi, their foul disposition turned even more hostile. On the night of June 3, men from this unit and others broke up a dance at the service club by refusing to pay admission, overwhelming the club assistants, and pouring in through doors and windows. Black MPs and a white detachment from the 99th Infantry Division cleared out the mob which numbered about 2,000. Upon hearing of this incident, the War Department restricted the 364th to Camp Van Dorn and in early 1944 transferred the

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[10]Memorandum, Truman K. Gibson to the Deputy Chief of Staff, June 15, 1943, ibid.

unit to the Aleutian Islands where it performed garrison duties for the rest of the war.

The Camp Van Dorn mutiny and the other actions by members of the 364th reflected indefensible terrorization and misconduct and did nothing to improve the public or the Army's estimation of blacks as soldiers. This unit had a history of troublemaking before it came to Mississippi, and while the Army clearly made a mistake in assigning the unit to a deep South post, the actions of the regiment reflected more than a protest against discrimination and racism. The regiment's impatience with second-class treatment while serving in the armed forces of the "arsenal of democracy" certainly affected their thoughts and actions. Yet the 364th's conduct perhaps reflected an adolescent state of mind, a general disregard of the law, and even a concerted effort to get out of the Army by breaking military regulations whenever possible. A few habitual law-breakers within the unit could have affected the actions of other men, or the 364th's actions may have emanated from a consuming hatred of some of its white officers, who in turn might have tried to make life miserable for their men. Fortunately, the 364th represented the exception rather than the rule among black units. Yet its conduct tainted others with the reputation of misfits and malcontents. Regrettably, the 364th reinforced the War Department's low estimation of black soldiers. Such an attitude died hard, for it had been the conventional wisdom since the American Revolution. What a recent work on World War I concluded about that era certainly carried over to World War II, that the official judgement of black soldiers was founded on "the ambivalence of racism, the double-barreled desire to use the black man like an inferior yet have him perform like

an equal; to deal with him according to a double standard but judge him by a single standard."[11]

While the investigation of the Camp Van Dorn mutiny continued, another violent incident occurred at Camp Stewart, Georgia. Tension had increased there for several months. Located forty-three miles from Savannah, Stewart lay in an isolated area. The closest town, Hinesville, proved too small to provide the usual services to military personnel, so Savannah represented the only place of diversion. The city, a congested production center, had mushroomed in size, partially because of the proximity of Camp Stewart and its complement of nearly 50,000, but also because of two shipyards, the Savannah Army Air Base, and Parris Island, a Marine training center. On weekends shipyard workers, marines, airmen, sailors, and soldiers all converged on the town, creating a tense atmosphere.

Black military personnel faced a number of difficulties that were outgrowths of the separate and unequal practices applied in Savannah and in the rest of the South. Black troops formed 40 percent of the Camp Stewart population, but the facilities and transportation provided for them proved woefully inadequate. For example, there were six buses for whites to every one for blacks. In addition, the ticket counters in Hinesville and Savannah were segregated, and this aggravated the situation since one man worked both windows and invariably served whites first. One sergeant was docked five days' leave for being six hours late in reporting back to camp for this very reason. Also, the recreational facilities for blacks in Savannah proved inadequate. The black USO in that city

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[11] Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, 369-70; Barbeau and Henri, Unknown Soldiers, xv.

had a maximum capacity of fifty, while the white USO was a spacious two-story building. On base conditions were congested for the fourteen black anti-aircraft battalions, and in some cases the situation worsened when white officers made ill-advised decisions based on racism. In one case a white lieutenant decided to ban five leading black newspapers from Camp Stewart, an act that was so obviously discriminatory that the War Department quickly rescinded the order. Complaints by blacks at Stewart, especially northerners, referred to harsh and discriminatory treatment at the hands of white MPs and generally degrading experiences both at the base and in Savannah.[12]

Complaints from blacks stationed at Camp Stewart had dribbled in to the War Department since 1941, but in early 1943 the department began receiving an alarming number of letters protesting conditions there. Members of the 369th Coast Artillery, a New York outfit, began a letter-writing and petition campaign to get the attention of the War Department and, they hoped, to elicit enough concern so that they might be transferred out of the South. The 369th had seen service in Hawaii and on the Canadian border, but when confronted with southern racial etiquette, its members responded negatively. One such letter sought to "denounce and condemn the atrocious treatment accorded the men of the 369th Coast Artillery in Camp Stewart." Its author complained that "these fine Negro young men, all originally from New York City, are not at all accustomed to the perverted and ignorant perspective of the South in regard to

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[12]Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, 370-71; Byers, "Negro in Military Service," 55, 64.

colored people and therefore should certainly not to be subjected to it." An immediate investigation into the situation at Camp Stewart, then, "would be a sensible and very timely recourse."[13]

The letter campaign attracted the War Department's attention but failed to get the soldiers out of the South. On the basis of the letters and various other complaints, the department sent General Benjamin O. Davis and Lieutenant Colonel Davis G. Arnold to Camp Stewart where they conducted an investigation from May 17 through May 21. The inspectors found dissatisfaction rampant among the black GIs and especially within the 369th and the 100th Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion. These men, as well as members of other units, were well educated and intelligent. They looked with disfavor upon the racial separation of base facilities and upon the oppressive discrimination practiced in transportation, recreation, housing, police treatment (including MPs), and other aspects of Savannah's racial customs. In fact, they proved so boisterous in presenting their grievances to General Davis that he had to upbraid them for speaking rudely to an officer and remind them of the conduct expected of them as soldiers.

Davis and Arnold reported their findings to Inspector General Peterson, who in a subsequent memorandum outlined several recommendations designed to help rectify the situation. In particular Peterson advised close observation of the 369th and 100th since these units appeared to be the most disaffected. He also recommended an increased effort to obtain

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[13]Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, 370; Kenneth Ancrum to the Adjutant General, May 16, 1943; Unidentified memorandum, May 15, 1943, AG 291.2, RG 407.

additional entertainment and recreational facilities in Savannah, the staggering of pass privileges to black personnel in an effort to avoid "excessive overcrowding" of the buses between camp and town and the jim crow facilities in Savannah, greater use of black MPs with limited authority at crucial locations on and off base, close coordination between the Service Command and Training Center to defuse potentially explosive situations, and "the institution of measures to ascertain the names of leaders inciting unrest so that they may be known and appropriate disposition may be made of them." These recommendations reflected once again the Army's attempt simply to keep the lid on a volatile situation in the hope that it would calm down by itself. It did not.[14]

Only five days after the Inspector General made his recommendations violence broke over Camp Stewart like a thunderclap. On the night of June 9 a rumor floated around the black area that white soldiers had raped and killed a black woman after murdering her husband; one version cited military policemen as the murderers. This report brought resentment to the boiling point not only because of long-standing problems but also because of two recent incidents of white civilian violence against black soldiers. At about 8:30 p.m. a mob began to form in the black area of camp, and one hundred black GIs armed with rifles turned deaf ears to their officers' pleas to disband. Someone fired a wild shot. Officers then called MPs into the area, and shortly thereafter the mob broke up. Within a short while a second mob formed, breaking into gun racks and

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[14]Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, 371-72; Memorandum, Peterson to the Chief of Staff, June 4, 1943, in "Violence Against Negro Military Personnel," CASW Records, RG 107.

supply rooms to obtain rifles and submachine guns. Other black soldiers joined the mob, intent on venting their pent-up hostility while still others took to the woods for safety or remained in their barracks. The men continued to mill around until about ten o'clock when more wild shots precipitated a pitched battle between black soldiers from the 458th Anti-aircraft Artillery and white MPs. During the riot four MPs received wounds, one of them serious, and an approaching civilian was injured. Just before midnight a small group of white MPs tried to cross a parade ground and were fired upon. One of the MPs, Private Ronie Lindsey, was killed. Finally, at about 12:30 a.m. two white battalions in half-tracks moved into the area, and the shooting ceased. Shortly afterward the blacks learned that the rumor of rape and murder that had sparked the violence was false.[15]

Without delay the War Department launched an inquiry, professing surprise that the mutiny had occurred. A board of officers convened, including Lieutenant Colonel DeMaurice Moses, a black who commanded one of the Camp Stewart battalions. The board found that the disturbance reflected pent-up emotions and resentments. The black soldiers, the board learned, were convinced they were not receiving fair treatment at camp or in neighboring towns, and many feared for their safety. Some of the men had simply decided to fight out of desperation without regard for the consequences of such mutinous conduct. Incredibly, despite its findings and those of the earlier Davis-Arnold report, the board disregarded the real issues in its conclusion when it fell back on old explanations. It

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[15]Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, 372; Savannah Tribune, June 17, 1943; Pittsburgh Courier, June 19, 1943.

ascribed part of the problem to the stationing of northern blacks in southern areas and to the "average negro soldier's meager education, superstition, imagination and excitability" which led to "a mass state of mind." The board then recommended disciplinary action against those who could be identified as having taken part in the mutiny, special training for MPs, an educational program to teach black soldiers the "dangers of rumor mongering, acceptance of rumors as truth, avoidance of 'chip on shoulders' attitude," and the disbandment of the 458th, with its men distributed to other units. Of course these recommendations did not really get to the crux of the matter since white civilian intimidation, the double standard used by the Army toward black GIs, and its insistence that northern blacks acclimate themselves to deep-South racial customs were not recognized as factors that helped create the disturbance. In the end the Army did not disband the 458th, although courts-martial did ensue. By the middle of July, eight black soldiers had been convicted in connection with the disturbance.[16]

Civil rights groups knew that mutinies might occur in southern camps if conditions did not improve. The NAACP, as a matter of course, sent an investigator to Camp Stewart, probably hoping to get the eight blacks being held for court-martial released or the charges against them reduced. The findings came as no surprise. Such unfavorable conditions as what the association termed "Nazi-racial attitudes" among whites, the transportation system, bigoted white MPs and the lack of black military

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[16]Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, 372-73; Pittsburgh Courier, June 19, 1943; Memorandum, Lt. Col. Robert E. Kinter to Gibson, July 7, 1943, in "Violence Against Negro Military Personnel," CASW Records, RG 107.

police with full authority, recreational facilities, and numerous cases of individual insults and violence against blacks proved prevalent. To the NAACP and most blacks it seemed highly unjustified for the Army to punish black soldiers who revolted against conditions the War Department blithely ignored. The NAACP did not believe that the Army was really surprised at Camp Stewart's violence or that the mutiny came about because of the soldiers' alleged "superstition, imagination and excitability." The NAACP forwarded its report to the Army in hopes of intervention, but nothing came of it except Secretary of War Stimson's pledge to look into the matter.[17]

Perhaps the boldest act of mutinous conduct on the part of black soldiers during mid-1943 involved neither death nor combat between whites and blacks. Yet the Camp McCain mutiny of July 5, 1943, showed clearly the breaking point of both black toleration and War Department inaction. The background of this episode reflected a common set of experiences by black soldiers stationed in the South, because the basic problems were similar to those that led to the explosions at Camp Van Dorn, Camp Stewart, and elsewhere.

Camp McCain lay eight miles south of Grenada, Mississippi, in the north-central part of the state. The closest cities were Greenwood, thirty-five miles southwest, and Starkville, eighty miles southeast. Grenada proved too small to furnish sufficient recreation or entertainment for an installation housing as many as 50,000 troops. Local whites were

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[17]"Along the NAACP Battlefront," Crisis, 50 (July 1943), 213-14; Pittsburgh Courier, July 17, 1943.

antagonistic, even hostile, toward black GIs from the camp whether in the neighboring villages like Duck Hill or larger towns like Starkville. The area had been the scene of a lynching within recent memory, and relations worsened with each act of individual violence against blacks as the war progressed. In an area where white troops were considered "outsiders," the experience of black soldiers proved to be unpleasant indeed.[18]

On Saturday, July 3, four black soldiers from Camp McCain--Sergeant Harry Jones, Sergeant Aaron Taylor, Private George Starks, and a Private Edwards (or Edmonds)--all of Company L, 470th Quartermaster Truck Regiment, received overnight passes and went to Starkville. After enjoying themselves Saturday and Sunday morning, they walked over to the bus terminal shortly after noon to get tickets back to camp. Each was accompanied by a woman. While waiting for the bus the soldiers engaged in some horseplay, and Sergeant Jones accidentally knocked a pop bottle from a sill and broke it. The ticket agent inquired as to which of the "niggers" broke the bottle; Jones handed the man a nickel in payment. The agent then turned to one of the other soldiers and, saying "you are a smart nigger aren't you," slapped him in the face. As the ticket agent herded the blacks out of the station, the terminal manager arrived and began hitting them with his walking stick. The blacks wandered down the street where two city policemen accosted them, asking, "where are you niggers going?" They replied that they were trying to find a way to get back to camp. Then, without provocation, the officers beat the soldiers with

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[18] Skates, "World War II and its Effects," 122, 125; Pittsburgh Courier, September 17, 1943.

their nightsticks, took them to jail, and beat them again. A military detachment took the men back to camp the next day. Their officers considered the two sergeants to be "about the top in the Company," and when they related their experiences to the company commander, he had no reason to doubt their truthfulness. A subsequent Inspector General's inquiry confirmed their story.[19]

As soon as the beaten soldiers got back to camp and reported to their superiors, their friends in Company L inquired about their condition and after learning of the incident became thoroughly disgusted. Some called it "a dirty shame," while others opined that "something ought to be done about it." The beaten men, their heads throbbing, simply replied that "our Company Commander is going to look into it" and either went to bed or, like Sergeant Jones, sat on the barracks steps and held his aching head.

Company L had been on the rifle range that afternoon and kept its firearms overnight for cleaning. As word of the Starkville incident spread around the company area, men formed a crowd, and the discussion grew more heated. Some decided they would go to Starkville and teach the town a lesson, but Sergeant Jones tried to talk them out of it, saying "it's suicide to go over there with a bunch of boys, to go over and try to raise a disturbance." Apparently some of the men still entertained the

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[19]Memorandum, Louis R. Lautier to Lt. Col. William L. Dinning, July 21, 1943; Peterson to the Adjutant General, September 11, 1943, in "Violence Against Negro Military Personnel," CASW Records, RG 107; Testimony of Sgt. Harry P. Jones, August 23, 1943, U. S., v. Pvt. Roy Brookshire et al., Case 239977, Records of the Office of the Judge Advocate General (Army), Record Group 153, National Archives (hereafter cited as JAG Records, RG 153).

thought, however, because one of them procured a truck for that purpose but later returned it. After dark the situation seemed to grow more calm, but underneath tempers raged. Shortly before bed check about twenty fully armed men from Company L decided to walk to the village of Duck Hill, about a quarter of a mile from camp, to vent their emotions there rather than travel the eighty miles to Starkville. Duck Hill had been a sore spot for the troops anyway because of white hostility.

The contingent began marching toward its objective, but almost immediately several of its members had second thoughts. Privates James Harris and Elijah Outlaw in turn warned these men that "if you turn back, I've got something for you" and patted their rifles ominously. Two or three of the men continued to ride herd on the others in this fashion, and shortly before midnight on July 5 the group approached the outskirts of Duck Hill. They stationed themselves on a railroad track about 300 yards from the town and began firing. The shooting lasted for ten minutes and several buildings were riddled while the residents trembled. No one was injured, largely due to the fact that nobody ventured from his house to investigate the source of the shooting. Satisfied, the blacks turned back toward camp. The firing had been clearly audible from McCain, and when the group returned, officials interrogated some of its members and threw them in the stockade. The consequences would be harsh, but these men had gained a symbolic measure of revenge against the local whites who discriminated against them.[20]

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[20]Pittsburgh Courier, July 17, 1943; Testimony of Jones, August 23, 1943; Memorandum, Capt. Julian E. Weisler, JAGD, to Commanding General, Third Army, August 30, 1943, U. S. v. Brookshire, JAG Records, RG 153.

On August 23 a court-martial convened at Camp McCain to try thirteen men accused of having taken part in the Duck Hill raid. Captain James L. Nolan, Trial Judge Advocate, presided. Before the arraignment the defense counsel, Lieutenant Colonel Charles A. Horger, asked the court to sever the cases of seven of the men because of differing elements in their defense. Nolan granted the request, so six were arraigned for violation of the 89th Article of War, which prohibited rioting; the other seven apparently never came to trial. Arraigned were Privates Roy Brookshire, Thomas Decker, James Harris, Elijah Outlaw, LaRue Steele, and Thomas Webb, all of Company L, 470th QM Truck Regiment. Before the trial the prosecution managed to obtain confessions from five of the six who admitted they had been members of the mob, though some denied firing. Brookshire denied taking part in the incident, but others implicated him. In a change of tactics each of the six, after having been arraigned, pleaded not guilty and tried to uphold a conspiracy of silence among themselves. The prosecution, however, asked that the confessions be admitted as evidence, and, over the defense's objections, Nolan agreed. This proved to be the end of the case for the defendants. A summary of the incident, the confessions, and other incriminating evidence constituted a strong case against the men, so the prosecutor did not have to rely on the defendants for testimony.

The court found all six guilty as charged. All were dishonorably discharged, forfeited all pay, and sentenced to hard labor. Brookshire, Decker, and Webb received ten years imprisonment, while Harris, Outlaw, and Steele received fifteen years. Although some protested being forced to participate in the mutiny, either the court could not determine who went voluntarily and who was coerced, or it did not care. The Judge

Advocate General's office in Washington approved the disposition of the cases, and the men were sent to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Some did not serve complete terms.[21]

The Camp Van Dorn, Camp Stewart, and Camp McCain incidents were only three of a number of major and minor clashes involving military personnel during the spring and summer of 1943. Damaging racial incidents occurred during this period at, among other places, Camp Breckinridge, Kentucky; Camp Claiborne, Louisiana; Camp Forrest, Tennessee; Camp Phillips, Kansas; Camp San Luis Obispo, California; Camp Shenango, Pennsylvania; Fort Bliss, Texas; Lake Charles, Louisiana; MacDill Field, Florida; March Field, California; and Nashville, Tennessee. No matter how small, these incidents and simultaneous civilian violence indicated that race relations, especially in the South, had been strained by the pressures of war.

During and after this series of racial clashes, the War Department decided that to avoid even more widespread violence something would have to be done, and quickly. The department expressed a genuine fear that civilian and military incidents would interfere with training and war production and at the same time provide damaging propaganda to the enemy. The Army still tended to place the blame for racial violence on such time-worn factors as inadequate recreational facilities, inadequate command, and outside interference, the first two of which contained some validity. But it ignored the fundamental cause of the violence--a racism that

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[21]Weisler to Commanding General, August 30, 1943; Findings of Board of Review, Judge Advocate General's Office, September 15, 1943; Memorandum by Col. George A. Hadd, September 20, 1943, U. S. v. Brookshire, JAG Records, RG 153.

treated black soldiers by a double standard. In a constructive move, the Army Service Forces, which had the basic responsibility for posts and camps, placed the continuous examination of policy toward black soldiers at the top of its priorities. Also, the Inspector General's office in mid-1943 began a series of surveys on conditions in camps with large numbers of blacks.

During the last few days of August and the first week in September, Colonel Lathe B. Row surveyed conditions at Fort Bragg, Fort Benning, Camp Shelby, and Camp Van Dorn; all had experienced racial disorders. Row conducted interviews with the commanding officers, provost marshals, chaplains, and other officers at each camp and administered questionnaires to a random sampling of black officers and men. He familiarized himself with certain potential trouble spots: transportation, recreation facilities, security of arms and ammunition, the use of white officers in black units, the frequency and effect of racial slurs and insults toward blacks, and relations with military police. Only 21 percent of black soldiers considered MPs fair in their treatment of them, while the corresponding figure among whites was 46 percent. Row found that "there exists a danger of racial disturbances in the general vicinities" of all four posts, that white officers in black units should be relieved as soon as black officers were trained to replace them, and that "the influence of Negro newspapers continues to be one of the greatest deterrents to the development of harmonious relations between white and black personnel." He requested that something be done to rectify the acrimonious relationship between black soldiers and white MPs at each of the camps.[22]

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[22]Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, 377-78; Memorandum, Col. Lathe B. Row to the Inspector General, October 13, 1943; Memorandum, Gibson

The Inspector General's office digested this and similar reports and produced a series of overall recommendations designed to correct a variety of race-related problems. These included tighter discipline over black troops, utilization of more black MPs, expanded recreation and entertainment facilities, equal treatment of black officers, and increased use of courts-martial to stop fomentation of racial violence. In addition, the recommendations advised furnishing black newspapers with official press releases, exercising censorship on them if racial outbreaks threatened to occur, providing better lodging for black troops in camp towns, and curiously, greater control of venereal disease among blacks. All nine recommendations had come before the War Department in the past, mostly from William Hastie, but the Army at last appeared to take the situation more seriously. While not calling for any fundamental changes, the recommendations in effect tried to put clamps on the lid rather than check carefully to see what was boiling and how to reduce the temperature.[23]

Shortly thereafter the Advisory Committee on Negro Troop Policies, headed by Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy, attempted to transform some of these recommendations into reality. McCloy wanted to show that the Army was ahead of the rest of the nation in dealing with racial matters, though he admitted the need for considerable improvement in a variety of areas. In reality the Army still practiced segregation, assumed that blacks were the perpetrators of racial incidents, and tried

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to Brig. Gen. B. O. Davis, June 30, 1943, in "Reports--Racial Tension," CASW Records, RG 107.

[23]Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, 378-79.

either to suffocate them through tighter control or gain their respect through highly visible but peripheral changes in racial policy. Among its first actions, the McCloy Committee urged Chief of Staff George C. Marshall to circulate a memorandum stating official Army policy concerning racial matters. Marshall issued the statement on July 13, 1943, and he forcibly asserted that command responsibilities included the fair treatment of all troops and that disaffection among blacks must be curbed. "Adequate facilities and accommodations will be provided negro troops," he disclosed, but in physically improving the situation, officers needed to recall that "under no circumstances can there be a command attitude which makes allowances for the improper conduct of either white or negro soldiers." Marshall concluded by reiterating that maintenance of discipline and order among troops and with civilians remained a top priority. "Mutinous conduct will be dealt with as such and violations of the principles of military discipline will not be countenanced in any element of the Army," he warned. Specific recommendations did not accompany the directive.[24]

In addition to Marshall's letter, the McCloy Committee executed other plans. The Bureau of Public Relations, as a result of the committee's advice, began issuing regular press releases to black newspapers that dealt with the participation of black GIs in the war effort. The bureau gradually became the object of regular visits by black reporters. The Office of War Information, which conducted weekly surveys of the black

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[24] Ibid., 380-81; Memorandum, Gen. George C. Marshall to Commanding Generals, Army Air Forces, Army Ground Forces, and Army Service Forces, July 13, 1943, AG 291.2, RG 407.

press, found this tactical move gained black support when the number of articles unfavorable to the military declined while those favorable increased. The black newspapers proved to be "hungry for news of Negro soldiers" and used "almost every item which the bureau could supply." Articles critical of the War Department, of course, did not disappear, but this trend seemed heartening.

The McCloy Committee also persuaded the Special Service Division of the Army to produce a closely edited film entitled The Negro Soldier. After the film was completed in the fall of 1943, an editorial board composed of blacks and whites deleted the potentially offensive and "just plain corny" sections, and it proved to be a considerable success when released. Less than 3 percent of the black soldiers and 5 percent of the whites objected to it. At about the same time the committee sponsored the publication of Command of Negro Troops, a handbook containing the recommendations and findings of previous surveys with specific instructions of action for officers in certain situations. Many officers, however, either partially or totally disregarded it. The Army instituted another committee suggestion when it created teams of investigating officers whose primary function lay in conducting periodic inspections of military camps and making recommendations designed to improve race relations.[25]

The Army's reiteration and clarification of its segregation policy, issued on July 8, 1944, proved the most noteworthy of the committee's actions. Mainly because the order was never enforced, most people did not realize that the Army had a policy prohibiting segregation of some

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[25]Lee, Employment of Negro Troops, 383-97, 401.

facilities on the basis of race. But the July memorandum spelled out the anti-segregation order with such forthrightness that it temporarily became the hottest item in the black press. It specifically forbade segregation in post exchanges, transportation owned or operated by the military, and theaters, and warned that "effective compliance with War Department policies enunciated herein will be obtained through inspection by responsible commanders and inspectors general." If inspection revealed discrimination caused by segregation, "the commanding general of the service will initiate action to insure full compliance with the announced policy." The order "did not immediately affect all of the enumerated services at all posts." In fact, enforcement proved less than uniform, and especially in the South, segregation of facilities continued if only by custom. The black press, hungry for good news, hailed it as a milestone and devoted considerable coverage to it.[26]

If blacks welcomed the anti-segregation order, many southern whites condemned it as a flagrant effort on the part of outside forces to obliterate the color line. Alabama's Governor Chauncey Sparks and Senator John Bankhead, along with Congressman John E. Rankin of Mississippi, led the blast against the order. Sparks moaned that "it breaks down an essential principle of race relations in the South and grievously handicaps those of us in leadership positions who are trying to bring about a better relationship between the two races." Rankin, dubbed by the black press as the leader of the "white trash bloc" in Congress, predicted that the order

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[26] Ibid., 397-99; Memorandum, Maj. Gen. J. A. Ulio to Commanding Generals, Army Air Forces, All Service Commands, Military Districts of Washington, September 1, 1944, in "War Memorandum #97 Banning Army Post Jim Crow," GOF, NAACP Papers.

would precipitate widespread violence. In addition, Congressman A. Leonard Allen of Louisiana informed Henry Stimson that the order "is a blow at the Southland and it is a slap at every white man from Dixie wearing the uniform." Finally, a private citizen from New Orleans explained that "every true friend of the Negro and their more sensible leaders know that such actions as this only serve to retard sincere efforts that are being made in his behalf."[27]

Overall, the policy changes generated by the military violence of 1943 and the McCloy Committee lessened tension. Yet they did not reduce tension below the danger point, nor did they stop violence. Racial clashes involving military personnel continued to the end of the war. These changes occurred not only in response to racial violence but also because 1944 was an election year, and the administration counted on the northern black vote. What occurred, then, amounted to a balance between pacifying blacks and care not to alarm southern whites who maintained a strong faith in the color line and all it represented.[28]

The War Department was forced into making a number of changes in its policies toward black soldiers because of the alarming increase of violence during mid-1943 and also because the nature of the violence shifted to embody black aggression. If this shift had not taken place, perhaps these belated changes would never have emerged. The Army recognized, finally, that blacks could only tolerate so much maltreatment and

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[27]Pittsburgh Courier, September 2, 1944; A. Leonard Allen to Stimson, September 1, 1944, AG-OSW-291.2, RG 407; T. C. Holmes to Marshall, September 6, 1944, AG 291.2, RG 407.

[28]Dalfiume, Desegregation of Armed Forces, 89.

degradation. The frequency and intensity of the violence was significant because prior to 1943 that kind of violence had proven rare. Then it assumed epidemic proportions. The Camp Van Dorn, Camp Stewart, and Camp McCain mutinies signaled the beginning of a new set of problems for the War Department, even as they reflected the height of black assertiveness in the South. Though such mutinies continued to the end of the war, white reaction to perceived threats against the solidarity of southern society became more intense during and after mid-1943. From then on the crest of black militance would begin to recede, at least publicly, while the weight of the white majority's reaction continued to build. Southern whites displayed the ultimate in racial provincialism by riding roughshod over the basic rights of the black soldiers, forcing them to fight back through mutinies, and then professing that the violence was their fault.

Part of the problem arose from the fact that members of black Army units, like all others, were young, and younger blacks tended to be outspoken and impatient. Blacks also equated service in the armed forces with achieving full citizenship, a notion whites did not accept. When the black composition of the Army never reached the prescribed 10 percent, when the overwhelming majority found itself in service rather than combat units, when blacks found conditions in the military not unlike civilian life, they expressed resentment. In the military blacks underwent discrimination roughly in conformity with their civilian status, and each instance of assertiveness, which included mutinous conduct, naturally brought howls of indignation from Washington. The mutinies of 1943 represented a dangerous trend that the War Department was determined to contain. Without evoking much sensitivity toward the special difficulties

black GIs faced, the department sought to make a number of changes that would both help pacify blacks and avert mutinies in the future through internal preventive security. Because the War Department could or would do little to contain white civilian violence against black soldiers, it tried to make the situation on bases more stable while at the same time avoiding major alterations in the southern racial system. Mutinies by blacks continued to erupt throughout 1944, however, revealing that most of the Army's policy changes either proved ineffective or were not enforced.

CHAPTER VI

"AN EPIDEMIC OF INTERRACIAL VIOLENCE"

The Mobile riot and racial violence in southern military camps during the spring of 1943 signaled the beginning of a three-month crisis in American race relations. It reached its vertex in the eruptions that occurred in the seven-week period from mid-June to early August. Major race riots in Los Angeles, Beaumont, Detroit, New York, and hundreds of smaller incidents caused more disruption, confusion, concern, and bitterness than at any other time between World War I and the 1960s. The Social Science Institute at Fisk University counted 242 such outbreaks during 1943, producing what a later observer labeled "an epidemic of interracial violence."[1]

In the course of these incidents the nature of the major riots completed a metamorphosis from white to black aggression that had been in the making since World War I. In 1919 evidence of black assertiveness emerged in the devastating Chicago riot of July. In 1935 black Harlemites rioted against the twin ravages of economic depression and racial discrimination in what proved the first "new style" or "modern" civilian race riot. Blacks attacked white-owned property in and around the ghetto, foreshadowing similar patterns during World War II. Black aggression increased in the 1943 Detroit riot, and during the Harlem riot of that year it had become a trend--at least in the North. Shooting, burning, and looting caused property damages to replace the number of deaths as

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[1]Sitkoff, "Racial Militancy," 671.

the chief indicator of the seriousness of the incident. The same form of black aggression would typify race riots in the 1960s. The change in the nature of race riots from World War I to World War II, however, proved a non-southern phenomenon. The "southern style" riots of World War I, in which whites attacked blacks and their property without encountering significant resistance, carried through the 1940s. In 1943 the Mobile and Beaumont riots retained the old characteristics, indicating that race riots differed in the South.

Reacting to the riots in the spring of 1943 the NAACP held its "Emergency Conference on the Status of the Negro in the War for Freedom" in Detroit. The conference, meeting from June 3 through 6, featured panels on blacks in the armed forces, the press, radio, motion pictures, and industry. Even as these discussions took place, about 25,000 white workers walked off their jobs at the local Packard plant in opposition to the promotion of three blacks to skilled positions. This action came only a week after the more violent response of Mobile shipyard workers to black promotion and thus caused grave concern among both civil rights leaders and labor spokesmen. While the whites gradually drifted back to work a few days later, some observers attributed the strike to Axis influence, while one black newspaper editor termed the incident an outgrowth of "Dixie in Detroit." Labor competition, racial attitudes, and the city's sudden wartime growth, however, provided the main reasons for the Packard strike.[2]

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[2]Program for the Emergency Conference on the Status of the Negro in the War for Freedom, June 3-6, 1943, in "Emergency Conference Resolutions, Detroit, 1943," GOF, NAACP Papers; "Hate Strikes," Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations, 1 (August 1943), 4; Pittsburgh Courier, June 12, 1943.

As the Packard strike continued and Detroit's citizens sought scapegoats for the walkout, the second major race riot of the season erupted. Racial tension had built up in Los Angeles for at least a year. The servicemen in Army and Navy installations in the area flocked to the city in search of diversion from military routine or relief from the tension that stemmed from impending shipment to combat areas. The presence of a large Mexican-American population served as another source of tension. As was the case with blacks in the South, Mexican-Americans usually received the blame for adverse conditions or crime waves in the city. Since the beginning of the war, the local press had engaged in stereotyping Mexican-American youths in particular as the perpetrators of criminal activities that, by implication, hindered the war effort. The Hearst press led this development as its front pages carried stories of a "Pachuco Gangster" or "Zoot-suit Hoodlums," and this gradually built up resentment among whites.[3]

The "zoot suit" proved a favorite among underprivileged youths, perhaps because of the instant recognition that came from wearing such an outlandish costume. Its long coat with overly-padded shoulders, pegged trousers that ballooned at the knee, and standard accoutrements such as four-foot-long watch chains and wide-brimmed pancake hats provided a visual stereotype. Because of unusual press coverage, zoot suiters represented in many minds a combination of negative aspects long attributed to Mexican-Americans, specifically the vision of vagrant youths whose

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[3]Guzman, Negro Year Book, 236; Carey McWilliams, North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking Peoples of the United States (Philadelphia, 1949), 238.

livelihood came from criminal actions. A number of incidents from the spring of 1942 through early 1943, in which Mexican-American youths served as the alleged instigators, gave further rise to tensions both in the city and in neighboring military bases.[4]

On the night of June 3, zoot suiters and sailors clashed, provoking five successive nights of rioting against Mexican-Americans. The press and local police openly sided with the aggressors, helping produce well over one hundred injuries during the violence that climaxed on the night of June 7. Military authorities eventually took responsibility for ending the riot and declared the city off limits to all servicemen. Official pronouncements from state and federal authorities cooled the rioting fever as the Mexican ambassador to the United States lodged a formal complaint with Secretary of State Cordell Hull. Clearly, the riot showed that racial and ethnic intolerance was not confined to one specific region, and further indicated that violence was escalating to dangerous proportions.[5]

In the wake of the Los Angeles riot, racial violence again erupted in the South. The third major race riot of the year occurred in Beaumont, Texas, only one week after the California outbreak. It provided perhaps the clearest example of a "southern style" riot during the war era. In

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[4]R. H. Turner and S. J. Surace, "Zoot-Suiters and Mexicans: Symbols in Crowd Behavior," American Journal of Sociology, 62 (July 1956), 14-20; Ruth D. Tuck, "Behind the Zoot Suit Riots," Survey Graphic, 32 (August 1943), 315.

[5]McWilliams, North from Mexico, 244-53; "Zoot Suits and Service Stripes: Race Tension Behind the Riots," Newsweek, June 21, 1943, p. 36; Pittsburgh Courier, June 19, 1943.

terms of the deaths and destruction it created, the Beaumont incident served as the single most severe southern racial outbreak of the war, and it was the most shocking illustration of southern determination to protect the color line against real and threatened black encroachments.

In 1943 Beaumont's metropolitan area proved to be the "Number One Boomtown of Texas." The city lay eighty miles east of Houston within a short distance of the Louisiana border. A number of smaller cities surrounded it, and along with Beaumont ballooned in size during the war to produce an area that bulged with war production. In 1940 Beaumont contained 59,000 citizens, of whom about one-third were black; by 1943 the population stood at over 80,000, with blacks remaining about a third of the population. Surrounding towns underwent similar growth: Orange from 7,500 to 38,000; Port Arthur from 56,000 to 70,500; and Port Neches and Nederland from 5,500 to 9,100. As in other areas, these cities had to support population increases of as much as 500 percent with prewar services and facilities.

In Beaumont, for example, a Congested Production Areas survey reported that only one house in the entire city was available for rent, while in Orange and Port Arthur "there was not a single house, apartment, or room available." This forced many workers to improvise, sleeping in autos or in "hot beds" while others commuted from as far away as fifty miles each day. Such conditions in turn produced high rates of absenteeism and turnover. Within the cities, bus systems staggered along as they tried to carry wartime populations with inadequate prewar equipment. Autos proved scarce, and as a result many people walked to and from their jobs. Health facilities in the area proved similarly inadequate, with only one physician

available for every 5,000 citizens as compared to a wartime standard of one per 1,700. This problem was compounded by Beaumont's inability to dispose properly of its garbage, so that one section of the city experienced the nauseating smell of an exposed dump while flies had to be swept out of nearby rooms daily. The city administration placed hogs on the huge piles of waste, but this had little effect. Other problems included shortages of food and ice, recreational facilities, nurseries for working mothers, and police forces.[6]

The area contained a number of war industries, and shipbuilding was by far the largest. In Beaumont the Pennsylvania Shipyards employed about 8,000 people and held government contracts in excess of $100 million. During 1943 the yard produced eighteen Liberty (C1A) ships, four Navy minesweepers, and eight oceangoing tugboats. Neighboring Orange harbored the larger Consolidated Steel Shipyards, built in 1940 under the auspices of the Maritime Commission as part of the prewar production expansion. Consolidated held government contracts totaling $240 million, employed about 20,000 workers, and produced destroyers and destroyer escorts. Several smaller shipyards dotted the area, along with plants that produced lumber goods, bombs, ammunition, and petroleum. The Beaumont area had been the scene of the spectacular Spindletop oil field of the early twentieth century, and during World War II the "Little Big Inch" pipeline that ran from Beaumont to Linden, New Jersey, testified to the area's

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[6]"Report on Adequacy of Services and Facilities in the Orange-Beaumont Area, Texas, November 15, 1943," in "Orange-Beaumont, Texas--Report on Conditions"; "Report on Orange, Texas, March 7, 1944," in "Port Neches, Texas--Report on Conditions," Series 13, Congested Production Areas Records, RG 212; Meyer, Journey Through Chaos, 174-75.

importance as an oil-producing region (see Figure 2).[7]

The city's wartime congestion was not unique--on the contrary, it proved fairly common in urban centers across the nation. Yet this East Texas city underwent a deterioration of race relations so severe that it spawned a major riot. Much of the friction in Beaumont's interracial affairs stemmed from the crowded public transportation system. A city ordinance prohibited blacks from sitting ahead of the jim crow dividing line, and drivers strictly observed the law. The Charles J. Reco incident of July 1942 resulted in part from this situation, and similar episodes increased as the war continued. Frequently, when buses became crowded, blacks stood in the aisles ahead of the dividing line, a situation that many whites did not tolerate. Beatings and shootings escalated, and with each incident racial tension grew. To blacks such outbreaks reflected the narrow-mindedness of whites, while conversely many whites regarded them as dangerous threats to the separation of the races.[8] On January 24, 1943, in a move that stemmed from the previous incidents of violence as well as the negative publicity generated by the Reco shooting, the Beaumont bus system inaugurated all-black and all-white coaches which lessened interracial contact and apparently satisfied all interested parties, at least for the time being. With the situation dangerously

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[7]Lane, Ships for Victory, 34-35; Ray Lacy to James A. Burran, April 10, 1973; Beaumont Enterprise, November 7, 1943; "Report on Adequacy of Services and Facilities in the Orange-Beaumont Area, November 15, 1943," Congested Production Areas Records, RG 212; Tindall, Emergence of the New South, 698.

[8]For stories of interracial incidents aboard Beaumont buses, see the Beaumont Enterprise, July 1, 2, 3, 15, 1942.

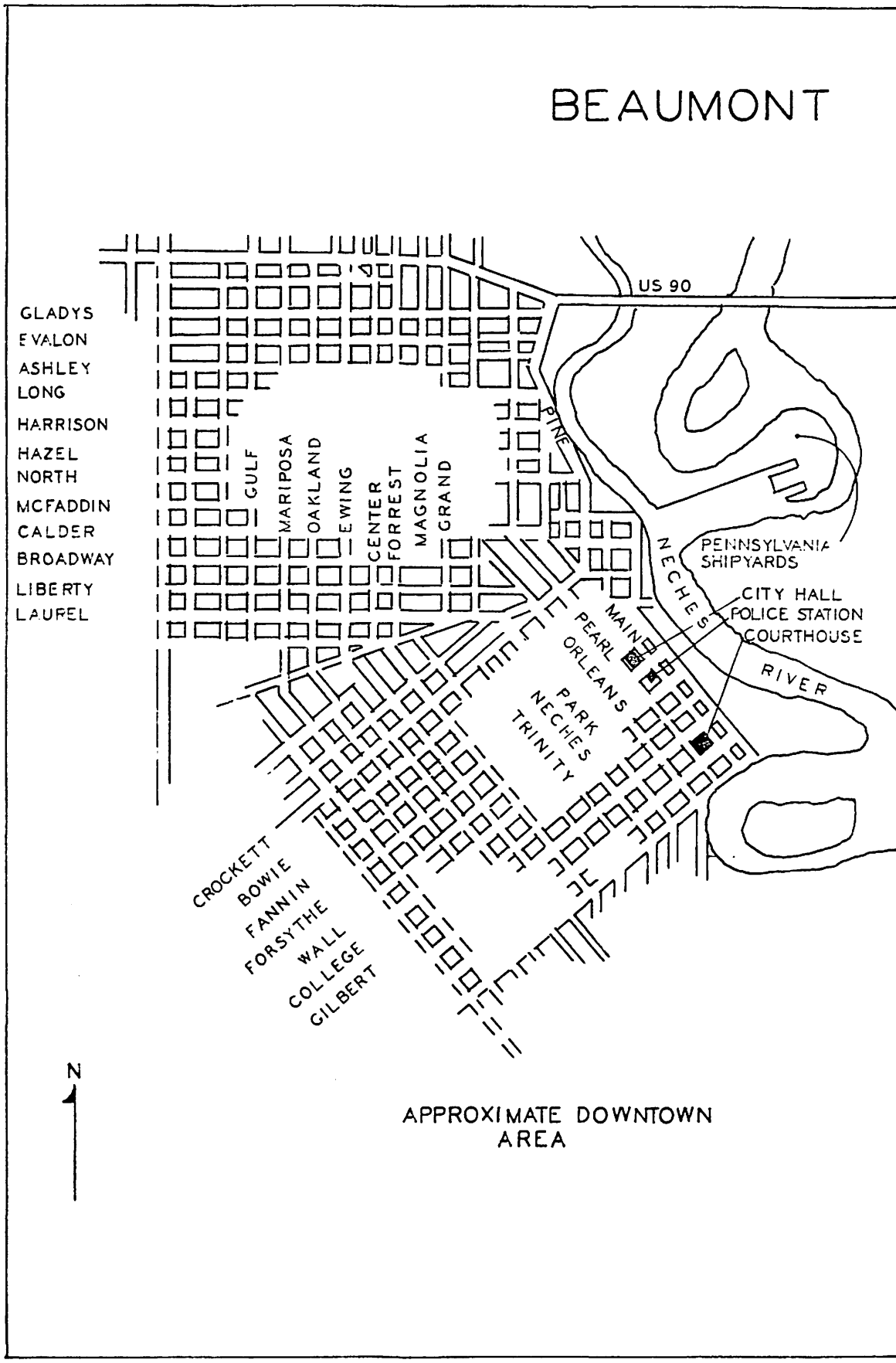


Figure 2. Map of Beaumont, Texas.

tense, such groups as the Beaumont branch of the NAACP registered no protest.[9]

As the spring of 1943 approached, Beaumont encountered a problem that, though not racial in nature, heightened overall tension. In April a local attorney circulated a petition to force a recall election against the city's mayor, Leslie Lowry (whom the Army had claimed), the acting mayor, George Gary, and five other city officials. Because of Beaumont's reputation as a haven for vice, some citizens thought replacement of these officials would help improve the situation. Ross Dickey, a former state policemen who had been chief of police since May 1942, immediately arrested nearly twenty persons on gambling charges, and the city manager, G. Hughes Petkovsek, announced that "gambling will never again be tolerated as long as I am city manager." This brief flurry of activity failed to produce the desired results, however, because in May petitions bearing the required 182 signatures were certified and a recall election set for June 19. The acrimony that accompanied this political feud did nothing to assuage feelings, and while many war workers may have cared little who governed the city, the general tension that came from congestion and worsening race relations was further compounded by the furor surrounding the recall election.[10]

As the atmosphere in Beaumont grew more volatile, almost any spark could have ignited it. An interracial rape on June 5 increased strain to the breaking point, and the tension and congestion that had built up over

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[9] Ibid., January 23, 1943; Beaumont Journal, January 23, 1943.

[10] Beaumont Journal, April 15, 17, 1943; May 6, 1943.

the months threatened to produce violence. Shortly before midnight on the 4th, a nineteen-year-old white telephone operator left work and began walking home along Laurel Street. As she approached the intersection of Laurel and Magnolia, Curtis Thomas, a twenty-four-year-old black ex-convict, accosted her. Apparently Thomas knew the woman's daily routine and had carefully planned the crime, for after grabbing her he carried her to a loading platform at a nearby storage plant where he had laid out a quilt. As he reached the platform the woman, who had fainted, regained consciousness and began resisting him. Thomas then stabbed and beat her, and then raped his victim three times. During the assault, he reportedly said to her, "the army is going to get me, and if I do this, I'll get killed for this and I won't be going to the army."[11]

After the assault Thomas fell asleep, permitting the woman to escape. She reached her home about 4:00 a.m. on June 5, and her parents called the police. Two squad cars immediately raced to the scene, and, as they approached, the lights and noise aroused Thomas. He fled into a dead-end alley where policemen shot him four times. Critically wounded, he was taken to the "negro ward" of Hotel Dieu Hospital. The next morning's newspaper reported the incident and made it clear that doctors did not expect Thomas to survive.[12]

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[11] Ibid., June 5, 1943; Beaumont Enterprise, June 6, 1943; Memorandum, Houston FBI to Frank L. Welch, June 16, 1943, Records of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Justice (hereafter cited as FBI Records). A Freedom of Information Act request by this writer yielded a body of previously classified material from the FBI's files, which are separate from those of the Justice Department, previously cited.

[12] Beaumont Journal, June 5, 1943; Beaumont Enterprise, June 6, 1943.

His condition, however, was irrelevant to some people, and before light on Sunday, June 6, a mob of about 150 men collected at the jim crow section of the Hotel Dieu. Only one policeman guarded the dying prisoner. Lacking a leader, the mob did not enter the building but simply milled around. Chief of Police Dickey and other officers sped to the scene, and while Dickey pleaded with the mob not to lynch Thomas, other policemen secretly spirited the alleged assailant to the city jail and placed him under heavy guard. Dickey, who did not recognize any members of the throng, reminded them that Thomas would die at any moment and asked them to let the law take its course. He could have had the impending recall election in the back of his mind as he spoke, for he knew that if mob action developed many would blame the city administration. Dickey's efforts succeeded, for after twenty minutes of admonitions, the mob dissipated.[13]

Thomas' death on June 8 probably precluded another lynching attempt. Feeling against him ran extremely high, especially after he admitted raping the white woman, and the fact that a riot did not result from this incident proved remarkable indeed. Yet the Thomas episode pointed out that many Beaumont whites were ready to take matters into their own hands if a similar crime occurred again. The tinder had begun to smoulder, and the spark that would set it off came a week later.[14]

On Tuesday afternoon, June 15, the Beaumont police received a telephone call from a twenty-five-year-old white woman stating that a black

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[13]Beaumont Enterprise, June 7, 1943; Beaumont Journal, June 7, 1943.

[14]Beaumont Journal, June 8, 1943.

man had raped her. The police sprang into action, knowing that this incident could prove disastrous. Within a few minutes members of the city police, sheriff's force, and Department of Public Safety (DPS) highway patrolmen reached the scene on the outskirts of town. Blocking off traffic, they began searching nearby woods with the aid of interested neighbors, and conducted a preliminary investigation. According to the woman's story, a dark-complexioned black man wearing brown pants and a pink or purple shirt, had approached her about mid-morning and asked for work; she told the man to weed the garden and later fed him lunch. As she put her three small children to bed for their afternoon nap, the man entered the room, threatened her with a sharp file, and took her to an adjacent bedroom where he raped her. The man then fled into the woods, and she walked half a mile to the nearest telephone and called the police. After hearing her story officers searched the house for clues but found none. They hoped that the manhunt would produce the culprit.[15]

Mixed reactions greeted the news of another interracial rape, the second such incident within two weeks and this one involving the young wife of a war worker and mother of small children. Many whites complained while others counseled patience and calmness, believing that the police would surely apprehend the rapist. An outward calm prevailed as the afternoon gave way to evening. The situation at Pennsylvania Shipyards, however, proved more explosive. Many workers came from outlying areas, chiefly East Texas and Louisiana. The same lower class, rural, or small

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[15]Beaumont Enterprise, June 16, 1943; War Department memorandum, Office of the Director of Intelligence Division, Eighth Service Command, Dallas, Texas, July 1, 1943, FBI Records.

town whites who had inundated Mobile and its shipyard likewise made up the bulk of Pennsylvania's work force. They brought provincial racist attitudes into a congested area already suffering from a multitude of difficulties. Many detested blacks and placed a high reliance on extra-legal action against threats to the color line. As outsiders, they felt little allegiance to Beaumont, and as people whose lives were fraught with tension, congestion, and confusion, they proved the first to react to the news that a black man had committed the cardinal sin of inter-racial rape. As the night shift began to replace the day workers, conversation turned to the afternoon's crime, and many heard fabricated or inflammatory versions.

Around nightfall over 2,000 workers angrily dropped their tools and marched out of the shipyard. Foremen pleaded with them, but one worker articulated the mood when he explained that "our duty is for the protection of our homes." Production halted as the mob began the short walk downtown to the police station. As the men marched they attracted attention, and others swelled the ranks. As the crowd neared the police station, it numbered around 3,000.[16]

B. O. Craft, in charge of the station that night, heard the approaching mob and ran outside. "They came out of the shipyards over there," he later related. "They came right up to the police station and flooded in. We tried to talk to them and reason with them but they took charge." Pandemonium broke out within the station as one officer hurriedly called Chief Dickey and the off-duty men. In the meantime the mob surrounded the

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[16]Beaumont Enterprise, June 16, 1943.

station which contained the city jail. Fearing that the crowd might storm the building, Dickey sent for the woman who had allegedly been raped that afternoon. After she arrived and inspected the prisoners she addressed the mob, saying that her assailant remained at large and urging the members of the crowd to search for him in the woods near her home. This ploy, designed to get the crowd to disperse, failed, for at that point a black trusty returning to the station from an errand was beaten severely before Dickey could rescue him. A few minutes later some of the would-be lynchers broke out a window and tried to snatch a black prisoner, but policemen pulled the terrified man back to safety.[17]

Meanwhile several hundred people broke away from the mob and walked two blocks to the Jefferson County courthouse where Sheriff W. W. Richardson met them. They asked if the county jail contained the culprit; to avoid a confrontation Richardson permitted several men to tour the cells. Of course no one would have recognized the alleged assailant, but the group satisfied itself that the man indeed was not there and rejoined the main part of the crowd. About midnight the frustrated mob heeded the admonition of one of its members who shouted, "let's go to nigger town." Part of the throng, which by this time totaled between 3,000 and 4,000, headed for a black residential district in the northern section of the city on Gladys Street. The remainder ransacked a second black district on Forsythe Street in the downtown area. The rioting lasted about six hours and continued until dawn.[18]

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[17] Ibid.; Houston Post, June 17, 1943; PM, June 17, 1943.

[18] Pittsburgh Courier, June 26, 1943; Chicago Defender, June 26, 1943; Beaumont Enterprise, June 16, 17, 1943.

During the outbreak the small bands of rioters set fires, overturned cars, and looted both houses and stores. Along Forsythe Street the mob burned down three funeral homes, a jewelry store, and a pharmacy owned by Sol White, who had distinguished himself among black citizens by purchasing $11,000 in war bonds. Several houses in the vicinity caught fire but were saved either by the Beaumont fire department or the buildings' inhabitants. In the Gladys Street area the activity proved similar as burning and looting were rampant. Autos could be seen speeding through town filled with stolen goods, mainly clocks, radios, jewelry, clothing, liquor, cigarettes, and other property. In this area rioters caused extensive damage to a radio shop, two cafes, and a number of other stores and houses. P. G. Thomas, owner of the Dew Drop Inn on Gladys Street, related that when the rioters approached his business, he retreated to a back room and peered through a service window as they broke down the front door and ransacked the building. He fled out a back door and escaped injury.[19]

With the night lit only by burning buildings and occasional streetlights, rioters sometimes mistakenly shot other whites. Fortunately, they did not bother the firemen who worked feverishly to extinguish burning buildings and autos in the area. One fireman, however, expressed his disgust at the mob as he watched fires being set. "If we'd start after the man setting the blaze," he complained, "he'd dodge into the darkness and we couldn't tell him from anyone else." If rioters did not harass

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[19]Beaumont Journal, June 16, 1943; Beaumont Enterprise, June 17, 1943; Houston Informer, June 19, 26, 1943; Dallas Morning News, June 17, 1943; Chicago Defender, June 26, 1943; P. G. Thomas to James A. Burran, March 1, 1973; Memorandum, J. Edgar Hoover to Wendell Berge, July 9, 1943, FBI Records.

firemen, however, they continued to wreak havoc with the black population. All night gangs of whites assaulted blacks, beating and robbing them. Many escaped injury by retreating to the innermost areas of the black sections, but others suffered the full force of the violence.[20]

One of the most concentrated outbreaks of violence occurred at the Greyhound bus station on Park Street, where fifty-two black draftees awaited a bus to their homes in Port Arthur. After midnight a mob of over 300 whites fell upon them, crying, "here they are, a whole bunch of them. Let's get them." Only a few of the blacks escaped injury. Irvin Collins was severely beaten as he ran from the building and narrowly escaped being shot. To avoid the mob, he crawled under a nearby house and remained there until dawn. Roy Ford escaped further beating as he dashed out of the lobby and climbed atop the bus station. From there he witnessed the terror below. Eotha Jones was in a phone booth when the whites attacked and ran outside only to have a police car shine its spotlight on him. A group of whites beat him thoroughly. Alex Mouton was less fortunate, for the beating he received caused injuries so severe that he died from them on October 4.[21]

Two other people died during the riot. John Johnson, a black man who worked for the American Ice Company, died after a group of whites shot him as he left work. Ellis C. Brown, a white carpenter, died from head wounds inflicted by unknown assailants. Police found him dead near the shipyard, and speculation pointed to blacks as the murderers. This may

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[20]Chicago Defender, June 26, 1943; Houston Informer, June 26, 1943.

[21]Houston Informer, June 26, 1943; Beaumont Enterprise, October 6, 1943; Hoover to Berge, July 9, 1943, FBI Records.

have been the case, for some blacks took advantage of the white invasion of the black districts to retaliate. Equally plausible, blacks may have killed Brown in self-defense. Whatever the cause, he remained the only white person to die during the outbreak. Many people, mainly blacks, suffered injuries during the rioting though records do not reveal the exact number. Hospitals reported eleven persons admitted for severe injuries, but they made up only a small portion of the wounded. Many blacks either treated their own wounds or left the city for aid; some feared for their lives and others thought they might be arrested. Considering the length and intensity of the violence, two hundred injuries would be a conservative estimate; the toll may have reached four hundred.[22]

Meanwhile, local law enforcement officials faced a desperate situation. During the period from midnight to daybreak, Chief Dickey could muster only his own force of under fifty, the 150-member police auxiliary, a handful of state policemen, and the small sheriff's department. City officials tried to get additional help by mobilizing the 18th Battalion of the Texas State Guard, but this unit never made it to the front. Having never before been called into an emergency, the two hundred guardsmen spent most of the night at Beaumont High School, locating and distributing their firearms. Instead of dispatching his men directly to the riot areas, Major Fred C. Stone, a local architect who served as the battalion's senior officer, moved the unit to the lawn of city hall. There the men pitched pup tents and unrolled barbed wire along the ground as if they expected an invasion. The arrival of a Salvation Army mobile canteen provided the highlight of the operation.

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[22]Beaumont Enterprise, June 17, 1943.

Since few guardsmen actively aided in the struggle to restore order, Dickey simply scattered his officers throughout the black sections and major intersections. Although the police arrested so many people that the city and county jails soon bulged with prisoners, this had little effect on the riot. The authorities frantically sought an interim detention center, and finally commandeered the Harvest Club, a large building on the county fairgrounds. In spite of the utter pandemonium that prevailed and the relatively few officers on hand, policemen still managed to apprehend 225 whites and six blacks. Most remained at the Harvest Club while city officials wondered what to do with them.[23]

When the riot broke out, city administrators placed a hurried telephone call to the governor's office in Austin, only to find Governor Coke R. Stevenson on his way to Washington and Lieutenant Governor John Lee Smith in the Midwest. In their place the president pro tempore of the Senate, A. M. Aikin, Jr., served as acting governor; he had occupied the office only one day when the riot broke out. Aikin proved reluctant to take drastic action and asked city officials to wait and see what the next few hours would bring. Meanwhile, he approved of sending extra state guardsmen to Beaumont, and within a few hours 1,600 men were on their way from Baytown, Conroe, Houston, Nacogdoches, Port Arthur, and elsewhere. At the same time Aikin ordered large quantities of ammunition sent to Beaumont from Orange and Port Arthur. Neither the 1,600 guardsmen nor the ammunition arrived in time to quell the disturbance. Highway patrolmen and Texas Rangers simultaneously filtered into the city, so that by

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[23] Ibid., June 17, 22, 1943; Houston Post, June 17, 1943.

the evening of June 16 over 2,400 law enforcement personnel occupied Beaumont. State officials finally contacted Governor Stevenson, but he appeared to take the matter casually. He remarked that "they can do in Austin what I would do. I have confidence in the adjutant general and director of public safety acting wisely in the situation." The unperturbed governor then continued on to Washington.[24]

At daybreak on June 16 the major violence ended. As state guardsmen and Texas Rangers poured into the city and local officials tried to maintain order, however, another outbreak threatened. Around mid-morning a group of 200 men, mainly shipyard workers, collected in front of the courthouse and confronted Sheriff Richardson. They insisted that the county jail contained the assailant. The sheriff, however, had been up all night and appeared on the courthouse steps armed with a pistol and submachine gun in a decidedly foul humor. "I'm damn tired of all this," he shouted. "Break up and go back to building ships like you should be doing." Someone jeered. "Let the damn fool that said that step up here," Richardson threatened. "Fact is, I'll take you all on--one at a time. And let me tell you, I'm going to keep law and order in this county." Rebuffed, the mob began walking toward the smouldering Forsythe Street area, apparently bent on causing trouble. Texas Rangers sprayed the throng with tear gas, however, and with that the threatened violence ended.[25]

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[24]Beaumont Enterprise, June 16, 17, 1943; Dallas Morning News, June 17, 1943; "Sen. Aikin has Busy Time Pinch-Hitting for Stevenson as Martial Law Reigns," State Observer, June 21, 1943, pp. 1, 5.

[25]Pittsburgh Courier, June 26, 1943.

The Beaumont race riot claimed three lives and hundreds of casualties. Some of those wounded were white, mainly because of mistaken identity during the darkness and confusion and partly because of isolated black retaliation. Yet the bulk of the injuries involved black people. There was also the hurried exodus of about 2,500 blacks from the city, most returning to hometowns in East Texas and Louisiana. The riot also resulted in the partial or total destruction of two hundred buildings and at least ten autos. Personal property losses from looting also proved considerable. And the loss of war production totaled 210,000 manhours.[26]

In the wake of the violence Beaumont stood paralyzed, but city officials took steps to insure stability. They cancelled the June 19 "Juneteenth" celebration, a holiday for blacks in Texas which commemorated their emancipation. The fact that the city recall election also fell on that day hastened their decision. Chief Dickey ordered all city buses off the streets and stopped interstate bus service. Major General Richard C. Donovan of the Eighth Service Command proclaimed the city off limits to military personnel. An 8:30 p.m. curfew was instituted, and Dickey closed all bars and liquor stores; other officials closed swimming pools, parks, baseball games, and other places where people might congregate. Downtown stores closed their doors for several days to avoid crowds. The failure of black employees to go to work immediately following the riot crippled cafes, hotels, laundries, and other establishments.

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[26]Beaumont Enterprise, June 17, 1943; War Department memorandum, July 1, 1943; Hoover to Berge, July 9, 1943, FBI Records.

Mail service was similarly disrupted since one-third of Beaumont's mail carriers were black.[27]

The impact of the rioting also affected neighboring towns and cities. Small disturbances occurred in Kountze, Nome, and Silsbee, and on June 16 officials sent home all black employees of Orange's Consolidated Steel Shipyards. State guardsmen protected the yards while Orange officials closed liquor stores. In Port Neches a rubber plant sent its 1,200 black employees home, and Port Arthur and Baytown took similar precautions. A rumor of rioting in connection with Juneteenth floated across Houston, prompting that city's mayor to place a full page advertisement in the Houston Post which urged residents to stop doing "Hitler's work. Stop circulating rumors which create tenseness and interfere with war production and attend to your own business."[28]

On the evening of June 16, Acting Governor Aikin reluctantly took a belated but necessary step when he declared martial law in Beaumont. From then until June 20 when Aikin lifted the order, control of the city fell to state Adjutant General Arthur B. Knickerbocker, who sent Lieutenant Colonel Sidney C. Mason to Beaumont where he assumed direct command.[29]

After Aikin imposed martial law, speculation arose over upcoming investigations. Chief Dickey and a number of other people were convinced that Axis sabotage sparked the riot, and he flatly charged that "there is

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[27]Pittsburgh Courier, June 26, 1943; Beaumont Enterprise, June 17, 1943; Beaumont Journal, June 16, 1943.

[28]Memorandum, G. P. Gannon to D. M. Ladd, June 17, 1943, FBI Records; Beaumont Enterprise, June 17, 1943; Houston Post, June 18, 1943.

[29]Beaumont Enterprise, June 17, 1943.

somebody behind it and if I could get my hands on him I would wring his neck." Much of Dickey's conviction came from an anonymous post card he received, stating that "you have just been placed on the secret payroll along with the Mayor of [the] United Patrons of Axis." The editor of the Beaumont Enterprise echoed these thoughts when he opined that "there is a strong suspicion that enemy agents are trying to create racial friction here, that they have been engaged in this kind of subversive work for months. Evidently their work is bearing fruit." These people fully expected an FBI investigation to bear out their notions. Bureau agents began work in the city on Wednesday, the 16th; for the remainder of the week they tried to piece the story together. In a June 28 report to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, however, agents found "no indication" that the riot was "instigated or inspired by foreign action." The bureau elected to forego a complete inquiry on the basis of this report. Immediately the Enterprise changed its opinion on the subject, and on July 9 remarked that "the fault lies at home and not abroad. The chief offenders are not foes of this country but its own citizens who may think themselves just as loyal as anybody else."[30]

While the FBI survey continued, the state began its own investigation, headed by Lieutenant Colonel Royal G. Phillips of the Department of Public Safety. He conducted a military court of inquiry to dispose of the 231 prisoners arrested in connection with the riot. The court got underway on June 17 and lasted four days. Phillips discovered that about 60 percent

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[30] Ibid., June 17, 18, 1943; July 9, 1943; Dallas Morning News, June 18, 1943; Pittsburgh Courier, June 26, 1943; Hoover to Berge, July 9, 1943, FBI Records.

of the 225 white prisoners were under thirty years of age and that thirty-one of them had criminal records. He also kept a close eye on the draft status of these people, hoping to catch evaders. When the court finished the hearing, it detained only twenty-nine of the prisoners for further action. Most of these people subsequently faced misdemeanor charges, such as carrying firearms, public drunkenness, and inciting to mob violence. The majority received fines of $25 plus court costs, so the penalty for rioting essentially carried a $30.20 retribution. The police caught one man with a sawed-off shotgun measuring only thirteen and one-half inches long, a federal offense. The inquiry charged no one with arson or murder.[31]

On June 22 the NAACP became actively involved when Walter White asked Houston branch secretary Lulu B. White to employ a white man or a black person who could pass for white to conduct an inquiry. The Houston branch hired Hobart Thomas, a black man who worked for the Houston Informer, and he interviewed a number of people. His questioning centered around the character of the white woman who said a black man raped her, the nature of the mob and its ringleaders, the broader issues behind the riot, and public opinion. Meanwhile, the NAACP discovered that a group of prominent white Beaumont businessmen had raised about $3,000 to compensate local blacks for losses during the riot. Whether they did this out of compassion or to keep blacks quiet remained unclear. At any rate several blacks

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[31]Memorandum, R. J. Abbaticchio to Hoover, September 14, 1943, FBI Records; Beaumont Enterprise, June 18, 19, 20, 22, 1943; July 10, 1943; Beaumont Journal, June 19, 1943. This writer was unable to examine the report of the military court of inquiry filed by Phillips because, according to DPS officials, it has disappeared.

received money, including Mrs. John Johnson, whose husband was killed. Others included H. N. LeBlanc, who received $301.97 to replace a 1936 Chevrolet that rioters overturned and burned, and L. P. Rideaux, who received $1300 for the loss of his shoe repair shop. Once the Justice Department decided against conducting a full-scale investigation, the NAACP's inquiry lost its momentum and quickly died out.[32]

While the FBI, DPS, and NAACP inquiries continued, the city awaited June 19 with trepidation. The cancellation of Juneteenth angered many local blacks, and the acrimony surrounding the recall election made that day a test of Beaumont's stability. It passed with no racial discord, and residents breathed sighs of relief when the acting governor lifted martial law the next day. The incumbent city officials fared worse, however, because the election toppled seven of them from office. Many citizens held them responsible not only for rampant vice but also for the riot. Chief of Police Dickey left office in December.[33]

There was an ironic footnote to the Beaumont riot, for a medical examination revealed that the white woman who claimed to have been raped on June 15 had in fact not been assaulted. Barker D. Chunn, a Beaumont physician, examined her immediately after the alleged incident, but authorities withheld the findings for several days. Chunn found that she

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[32]Walter White to Lulu B. White, June 22, 1943; Lulu White to Walter White, June 25, 1943; Walter White to Lulu White, July 1, 1943, in "Beaumont Texas Riots," GOF; R. T. Tatum to Lulu White, September 2, 1943; Lulu White to Walter White, September 13, 1943; Statements of Beulah Johnson, September 3, 1943, H. N. LeBlanc, September 3, 1943, and L. P. Rideaux, September 7, 1943, in "Houston," Branch File (BF), NAACP Papers.

[33]Beaumont Journal, June 21, 22, 1943; Beaumont Enterprise, November 28, 1943.

had neither been sexually assaulted nor engaged in sexual activities in the period immediately surrounding the alleged rape. Why she claimed to have been raped remained a mystery, but in any event the truthfulness of her accusation made little difference.[34]

The Beaumont riot was the largest single racial outbreak of the war in the South. The fact that it did not receive intense national coverage was due to the larger Detroit riot, which broke out only a few days after the Texas violence. The Beaumont episode also proved significant because it reflected familiar southern traits that characterized previous riots. Interracial competition in housing and labor helped produce tension in a congested production area. The violence was ignited by the familiar claim of interracial rape, and whites reacted by rioting against easily accessible black residents. Burning, looting, and killing ravaged the black community. In this way whites demonstrated their fear of black advancement and isolated but significant breaches of racial etiquette in a period of instability. The Mobile and Beaumont riots shared much in common, while the Detroit and Harlem riots both typified, in varying degrees, the change from white to black civilian aggression. Obviously, black experiences differed from South to North. Considering the conditions that caused the Beaumont riot, the city was fortunate that it did not suffer repeated violence. Perhaps conditions improved after 1943, or perhaps the city became so conscious of racial tension that efforts to prevent future outbreaks proved successful.

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[34] PM, June 18, 1943; Anonymous Jefferson County official to H. C. Galloway, September 25, 1943, in "Beaumont Texas Riots," GOF, NAACP Papers.

On June 16, as if to accent the nationwide deterioration of race relations, an outbreak occurred at the Chester, Pennsylvania, Sun Shipbuilding yards. In the midst of a hotly debated struggle over union representation, part of which involved black participation, company guards shot five black workers and killed one of them. Although yard officials placed the blame for the incident on the CIO, the company's own guards proved to be the guilty parties. This incident, however, paled by comparison with the Detroit riot, the single largest outbreak in the nation during the war.[35]

Occurring June 20 through 22, the Detroit race riot took thirty-four lives and did an estimated $2 million in property damage. The city, home of many major war industries, suffered from extremely congested conditions, for well over 500,000 people moved there during the period from 1940 to 1943. Blacks in particular found a critical housing shortage; most lived in the thirty-block ghetto known as Paradise Valley. The Sojourner Truth housing riots in 1942 attested to these difficulties, while the early June Packard strike provided evidence of worsening relations in the economic sector.[36]

The riot erupted on a Sunday when an interracial fight began near Belle Isle, a recreation area. That night rumors flew over the city, with the versions varying between blacks and whites. A mob of blacks rushed to Belle Isle only to find it barricaded, so they resorted to

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[35]"Industrial Violence," Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations, 1 (August 1943), 5; Pittsburgh Courier, June 26, 1943.

[36]Guzman, Negro Year Book, 237; Harvard Sitkoff, "The Detroit Race Riot of 1943," Michigan History, 53 (Fall 1969), 187-88.

throwing rocks at cars and beating white passers-by. At the same time whites attacked blacks along Woodward Avenue. By early the next morning portions of Paradise Valley were in ruins as blacks continued to attack the most accessible symbols of oppression, white-owned property, as well as white citizens who happened by. Whites simultaneously stepped up their attacks on blacks, pulling them from streetcars and businesses.[37]

The violence, which claimed thirty-four lives, all but nine black, ended only after federal troops entered Detroit on the night of June 21. Immediately a nationwide search for scapegoats got underway in an effort to provide explanations not only for the Detroit outbreak but the Mobile, Los Angeles, and Beaumont riots as well. An indignant NAACP offered free defense counsel for the black people arrested in connection with the riot and issued a report on the riot to help avert violence in other tension spots around the country. At the same time the Michigan state authorities produced a report that placed primary responsibility for the outbreak on blacks. Meanwhile scholars, journalists, and others puzzled over what the violence of the summer reflected and portended. Two sociologists, Alfred M. Lee and Norman D. Humphrey, quickly wrote a book dealing with the Detroit episode; they outlined a program for detecting symptoms of racial unrest and how to cure them. Other organizations warned of a possible continuation of the violence. The Urban League, for example, cautioned that the recent riots "indicate organized subversive design for hindering war effort by stimulating racial conflict in war industry centers," noting that Mobile, Los Angeles, Beaumont, and Detroit all

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[37]Sitkoff, "Detroit Riot," 189-90.

contained essential war production plants. Many others fully expected trials emanating from the Detroit riot to show Axis influence.[38]

Concerned writers joined in deploring violence that was especially shocking in view of the number of deaths, amount of destruction, and loss of war production. Business Week complained about the loss of manhours in the riot-torn cities, while the Nation observed that "the Axis is losing battles in Europe and the Pacific, but it can console itself with victories recently won in the United States." New Republic blamed the governors of Alabama, California, Michigan, and Texas for exhibiting shortsightedness in failing to see the clear signs of unrest in their states. Liberal columnist Thomas Sancton attributed the recent outbreaks to "a general shift of the economic and spiritual position of the Negro group relative to the white group." John Temple Graves reiterated his stance on the subject by observing that the immediate causes of the violence lay in "an atmosphere of war tension and high wages in which agitators for making the war an occasion for reforming race relations" and "implacables on the other side" were chafing for trouble. Virginius Dabney cautioned that evolutionary processes would provide the only answer to the nation's racial problems. "Men of goodwill in all parts of this land," he offered, "must counsel together with a view to achieving the most equitable and most speedy adjustments that are possible."[39]

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[38] Ibid., 191-96; Pittsburgh Courier, May 13, 1943; July 10, 1943; "Along the NAACP Battlefront," Crisis, 50 (August 1943), 249; ibid. (September 1943), 280; Lee and Humphrey, Race Riot; National Urban League, Racial Conflict--A Home Front Danger: Lessons of the Detroit Riot (New York, 1943), 14.

[39] "Race Riots Hurt," Business Week, June 26, 1943, p. 102; "Defeat at Detroit," Nation, July 3, 1943, p. 4; "The Governors Pass the Buck," New Republic, July 12, 1943, pp. 38-39; Thomas Sancton, "The Race Riots," ibid., July 5, 1943, pp. 9-13; Pittsburgh Courier, July 3, 1943.

Among conservative public officials, interest was high but explanations differed. In response to a request for information from Walter Davenport of Collier's, for example, Governor Olin D. Johnson of South Carolina reported that "we people in South Carolina have always been able to handle the race question without riots and trouble. We can solve our problems without outside interference from Washington or northern agitators." A similar response came from Alabama's Governor Chauncey Sparks. "If there be future race rioting, in my opinion, it will have its roots buried in inflammatory Negro newspapers." He complained that "the attitude of certain ambitious politicians and misguided and emotional missionaries who place shibboleths above reality" represented part of the problem. Thus, whether the reactions to Detroit's violence came from liberals or conservatives, they proved uniformly strong.[40]

While President Roosevelt appeared nonplussed about the racial situation, other politicians took advantage of the violence to build support among blacks. In a July 24 radio broadcast Wendell Willkie joined others in an "Open Letter to the American People" exposing the dangers of racial turmoil. "This is a time for serious thought and sober words," Willkie observed, adding that "the situation which flared so tragically in Detroit has its counterpart in many American cities." Vice President Henry Wallace countered that "those who fan the fires of racial clashes for the purpose of making political capital here at home, are taking the first step toward Nazism."

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[40]Olin D. Johnson to Walter Davenport, July 2, 1943; Chauncey Sparks to Davenport, June 30, 1943, in "Davenport re: Racial Tensions," GOF, NAACP Papers.

In Congress a tempestuous debate ensued over both the causes of the racial violence and proposed Congressional action. Southern conservative John E. Rankin attributed the Detroit riot to "the crazy policies of the so-called Fair Employment Practices Committee," and asserted that the only possibility for racial harmony was "complete segregation." Convinced that the Ku Klux Klan lay behind the unrest, Samuel Dickstein of New York called for an investigation by the House Un-American Activities Committee. Dickstein's fellow New York Congressman, Arthur C. Klein, introduced a resolution calling for a select committee to probe the violence. Senators Styles Bridges and C. Wayland Brooks proposed a companion measure to investigate not only the riots but the general status of minority participation in the defense effort.[41]

Before the wheels of Congressional action could begin turning, however, the fifth and final major riot of 1943 broke out. The Harlem riot of August 1 and 2 epitomized the change from white to black aggression in civilian American race rioting, and for that reason it was perhaps the most significant of the 1943 disorders. As the largest and most influential black community in the nation, Harlem also proved one of the most militant. It had spawned the Harlem Renaissance, was home to Marcus Garvey during the 1920s, underwent a black-aggression riot in 1935, and during the war served as the militant headquarters of black America. It was significant, then, that such violence broke out there.

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[41] Pittsburgh Courier, July 17, 24, 31, 1943; New York Times, June 24, 1943, p. 12; U. S., Congress, House, Congressional Record, 78th Cong., 1st sess., 89, pt. 5, pp. 6343, 7039, 7074; U. S., Congress, Senate, ibid., 7266.

The riot that began on the night of August 1 developed out of complex antecedents. Certainly the militancy that characterized Harlem intellectuals proved one of the factors. In addition, the riot of 1935 remained fresh in many minds. But in general black Harlemites felt frustrated, and this in part led to aggressive behavior. As one social psychologist who studied the riot later said, "once a framework of frustration has produced a reaction of aggression, the degree of aggression will depend upon the degree of frustration." Harlemites felt the frustration of discriminatory treatment within a wartime experience that proclaimed democracy as the savior of oppressed peoples overseas. On that Sunday night a black MP, Robert Bandy, and a white policeman, James Collins, argued over the arrest of a black woman in the lobby of a shabby hotel on West 126th Street. The argument resulted in the slight wounding of Bandy, but in the sweltering heat people in the streets began hearing rumors that the MP had been killed in front of his mother. Violence erupted as ordinary Harlem residents vented their anger against "the available symbols of the oppressor . . . the shining plate glass windows of stores" owned by whites. The rioters were not militants; rather they were "the Bigger Thomases of New York" who "passed like a cloud of locusts over the stores of Harlem." As Ralph Ellison described the scene in Invisible Man, "suddenly the block leaped alive. Men who seemed to rise up out of the sidewalks were rushing into the store fronts above me, their voices rising excitedly." From blind fury came a carnival-like atmosphere of looting and burning that lasted through the night.[42]

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[42]Orlansky, Harlem Riot, 4-6, 12; Pittsburgh Courier, August 7, 1943; New York Times, August 2, 1943, p. 1; White, "Behind the Harlem Riot," 221-22; Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man (New York, 1947), 464.

As the destruction continued, New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia called squads of policemen, firemen, and black Office of Civilian Defense (OCD) volunteers into the area, and the first of 8,000 New York State Guardsmen mobilized in area armories. LaGuardia's expeditious action confined the rioting to one night; it could have lasted much longer. In the end five blacks died, an estimated 400 received injuries, police arrested more than 500, and the rioters destroyed $5 million worth of property.[43]

As expected, white reaction to the riot counseled caution. Even such liberal periodicals as Commonweal suggested "both to the Negro press and to such agencies as the NAACP that they reconsider their tactics in the light of existing circumstances." Curiously, the black reaction proved confused, perhaps representing the shock that many blacks suffered upon hearing of the nature of the outbreak. The usually militant Pittsburgh Courier, for example, proclaimed that "the prepondering majorities of law-abiding American colored people are deeply downcast and humiliated because of the acts of vandalism and disorder committed by their fellowmen a short while ago." Even Walter White could not explain the violence and finally concluded that the riot "was the fury born of repeated, unchecked, unpunished, and often unrebuked shooting, maiming, and insulting of Negro troops, particularly in Southern states."[44]

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[43]New York Times, August 2, 1943, p. 1; August 3, 1943, pp. 1, 10; Walter White, A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White (Bloomington, 1948), 233-41.

[44]"Assessing the Blame," Commonweal, August 17, 1943, p. 407; Pittsburgh Courier, August 14, 1943; White to Henry L. Stimson, August 6, 1943, AG 291.2, RG 407.

Meanwhile the summer's violence initiated widespread changes that attempted to bolster race relations. The black press became less militant as editors recognized the perilous racial situation. Blacks stood to lose much of what they had gained, so Double V slogans and vitriolic editorials decreased. At the same time interracial committees sprang up across the nation as citizens recognized that violence could assume epidemic proportions. By October, Edwin Embree of the Rosenwald Fund reported the establishment of sixty-three such committees on the local and state levels. Lester B. Granger of the Urban League caught the tone of a shift in interracial concern by coining the term "victory through unity." In addition, a plethora of articles and pamphlets on ways to prevent race riots appeared to supplement Lee and Humphrey's Race Riot. Such pieces carried titles like "Reducing Racial Tensions," "How to Prevent Race Riots," and "Race Riot Prescription."[45]

In Washington a number of suggestions emerged. Some recommended that Roosevelt deliver a fireside chat on the recent violence, but he and his aides decided against it. Others suggested that the President create a committee on race relations within the Executive Office, a plan that received favorable publicity. Again, Roosevelt killed the idea but did appoint Jonathan Daniels as a coordinator of government information on the rioting. Finally, the administration stifled budding Congressional probes of the violence, so no official federal action emerged in the wake of the

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[45]Finkle, Forum for Protest, 168; Pittsburgh Courier, October 9, 1943; Lester B. Granger, "Victory Through Unity," Opportunity, 21 (October 1943), 147-51; Alfred Baker Lewis, "Reducing Racial Tensions," ibid., 156-57, 174; Winifred Raushenbush, "How to Prevent Race Riots," American Mercury, 57 (September 1943), 302-9; "Race Riot Prescription," Science News Letter, December 11, 1943, p. 381.

summer's rioting. Speculation pointed to the 1944 election as the main reason why Roosevelt remained passive toward the crisis.[46]

A brief flurry of controversy arose when the NAACP charged that Attorney General Francis Biddle had recommended banning black migration to certain congested areas as a practical way of helping ease racial tension. This charge stemmed from a story the New York Post carried on August 11 in which Biddle reportedly suggested to Roosevelt that "careful consideration be given to limiting, and in some instances putting an end to, Negro migrations into communities which cannot absorb them." Whether he actually made such a proposal or not, Biddle quickly denied it, explaining that he only meant to point out the housing problems of major cities like Detroit where racial tension remained high. Civil rights groups remained suspicious of Biddle.[47]

In the South the most beneficial action taken during the weeks after the riots came with the establishment of the Southern Regional Council (SRC). This agency was an interracial outgrowth of the all-black Durham Conference of October 1942 and the all-white Atlanta Conference of April 1943. Recognizing the need for a broadly based regional organization to foster better race relations, members of both conferences convened in Richmond on June 16. The statement the conference produced reflected a search for interracial stability, for it observed that the major concern confronting the South,

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[46]Dalfiume, "Forgotten Years," 105-6; "Federal, State, and City Action," Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations, 1 (August 1943), 15; Sitkoff, "Racial Militancy," 677; idem, "Detroit Riot," 204-5.

[47]Telegram, Roy Wilkins to Francis Biddle, August 9, 1943; Statement by NAACP, August 12, 1943, in "Biddle re: Riots," GOF, NAACP Papers; Pittsburgh Courier, August 21, 1943.

exclusive of the war, "is the problem of two great peoples caught up in the midst of transition between the powerful heritage of the past and the mighty pull of the future." The Richmond Conference laid the groundwork for the creation of the SRC, which in effect replaced the dying Commission on Interracial Cooperation. On August 4, 1943, a select group of the Richmond conferees met in Atlanta under the chairmanship of Howard W. Odum, and with that meeting the SRC formally emerged. It included among its major commitments in fostering interracial harmony support of a powerful FEPC, abolition of the poll tax, a federal agency to guarantee civil rights to minorities, and experimental integration of some armed forces units. The SRC was not without its critics from both the left and right, but it would play a valuable role in the future of southern race relations.[48]

The violence of the summer of 1943 made plain the conflict between blacks and whites over the deeper issues of the war era. In part a loss of communication fostered heightened discord and gave each racial group a warped view of each other. This difference of views permeated the political, economic, and military spheres of World War II life. Given the congestion, high mobility, shortages, and lack of interracial understanding that caused tensions to rise to the boiling point, it is remarkable that during mid-1943 even more severe violence did not erupt. That which did occur disrupted the war effort, but it could easily have been larger and

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[48]"The Richmond Statement: Resolutions of the Collaboration Committee," New South, 19 (January 1964), 16-17; Virginius Dabney, "The South Marches On," Survey Graphic, 32 (November 1943), 441-43; "Southern Regional Council," Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations, 1 (August 1943), 18-19.

more destructive. Countless other incidents, both large and small, accompanied the major riots as hardly an urban center in the nation escaped racial conflict of some magnitude. Rumors of riots also floated across the country, and considering the fact that rumors ignited three of the five major outbreaks of this period, they could have produced even more grim results.

For years historians, sociologists, and psychologists have to some degree been preoccupied with the issue of why riots exploded in some cities when many others produced similar background conditions but did not suffer these incidents. Models, theories, and formulas based on demography, social indices, politics, economics, and historical antecedents flowed from the pens of academicians.[49] Certainly, an examination of the Mobile, Los Angeles, Beaumont, Detroit, and Harlem riots provides a common variety of causal factors. The failure of interracial communication, the insensitivity of policy makers toward increasing tension, perceived or real threats by one group against another, labor and housing conflicts, and racial traditions manifested themselves in the five cities that underwent riots as well as in others. But rationalizing about spontaneous, semi-rational incidents does not provide the full explanation. Some places underwent riots because the various ingredients in the overall formula jelled at precisely the wrong time; a relatively inoffensive incident proved sufficient to ignite violence. Such was the case in five cities during the summer of 1943 when the exigencies of war affected people's sensibilities.

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[49]See, for example, Grimshaw, Racial Violence in the United States, and Short and Wolfgang, Collective Violence.

The same general causal patterns that prevailed across the nation produced different results. In the South, the violence involved white aggression against perceived threats to the color line, while in the North the violence involved black aggression in varying degrees that stemmed from years of frustration and oppression. Scholars have attempted to explain the changing nature of violence in a variety of ways. August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, for example, observed the shift from white to black aggression during the war as the result of intellectual and demographic alterations. Increased white sensitivity to the plight of blacks and corresponding militancy by blacks brought about by disillusionment with slow progress in the struggle for equal rights formed the intellectual shift. The growth of large, semi-autonomous ghettos formed the demographic shift. Thus, "even if white mobs were to form, they would be unable to attack and burn down the Negro residential areas." Similarly, Morris Janowitz perceived the change from what he termed "communal" to "commodity" riots during the war as emanating largely from "the role of the police and law enforcement agencies and . . . the mass media." Yet these and other scholars took as their focus the urban ghettos of the North and assumed that the southern experience was roughly similar. A transformation did occur in the nature of rioting, but it essentially proved a sectional one.[50]

In explaining the sectional divergence, historical patterns of race relations emerge as crucial. For southern blacks life meant

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[50]August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, "Black Violence in the 20th Century: A Study in Rhetoric and Retaliation," in Graham and Gurr, eds., Violence in America, 405-6; Morris Janowitz, "Patterns of Collective Racial Violence," ibid., 413.

virtually total segregation in a rigidly enforced caste system. Because of this, little interracial understanding existed. Blacks' working, eating, religious, social, and intellectual lives were restricted and defined. Attempts to break out of the caste system resulted in violence, thus helping produce the tradition of violence for which the South became noted. The total experience provided southern blacks with a restricted view and limited goals. When war came, conditions changed enough so that blacks in the South became hopeful of permanent advancements. When they reflected this hope through assertiveness, it seemed to whites that the color line was in peril. To maintain it, they employed violence.

For northern blacks the situation remained one of discrimination and oppression, but they did not suffer under a rigidly imposed caste system. Many attended good schools, read unprejudiced textbooks, rode integrated buses and trains, and enjoyed many everyday pleasures most southern blacks did not. Yet northern blacks faced frustration. Despite their freedom they remained in second-class positions. Their view was not limited by a visible color line, so they clearly saw that they enjoyed more advantages than their brethren in Dixie yet remained below whites. They lived in a superficial nearness to whites and felt tolerated but never accepted. The frustration that came from this position crystallized in the Harlem riot.[51]

While wartime conditions proved similar across the country, the violence differed in nature from North to South and brought different results. Blacks everywhere began to abandon overt forms of militance

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[51]Orlansky, Harlem Riot, 13.

after the riots of 1943, yet for southern blacks the retreat involved a bitter recognition of the power of the color line. As a larger proportion of the population, and as residents of the region only seventy-eight years removed from slavery, black southerners witnessed the limitations placed on them enforced through coercion and violence. The Beaumont riot provided the main symbolic act of white enforcement of the color line.

CHAPTER VII

FROM WAR TO PEACE?

The "epidemic of interracial violence" of the summer of 1943, both civilian and military, brought to an end the most intense racial discord of the war era. Through the last two years of the conflict, however, race relations did not measurably improve as violence continued at a less intense level across the South. Military mutinies and lynchings occurred with enough frequency in 1944 and 1945 to demonstrate that race relations remained tense. The violence of this period also cast a shadow of dread over the postwar South. A new set of factors brought on by the end of the conflict and reconversion would prove instrumental in the continuation of violence even as the war came to a close. There were no civilian riots during this period, but in the last two years other forms of racial violence, mutinies and lynchings, continued.

The mutinies generally showed the dissatisfaction of black servicemen with degrading experiences in the military. These incidents were invariably resistance to white intimidation or violence. Lynchings continued to serve notice of white resistance to a softening of the color line. Such incidents took on new meaning with the end of the war, because they increasingly showed a fierce determination by southern whites to establish prewar race relations--strict adherence to the caste system and swift punishment of those who violated it. After the clashes of 1943, southern blacks, bitter and increasingly alienated, withdrew from efforts to break down the color line. Having reached out for the equal opportunity supposedly guaranteed them, they recoiled from the hostile reaction of a

white majority whose ideas about protecting democracy evidently did not extend to them.

Lynchings and military violence began early in 1944 though the military incidents occurred with more frequency and intensity.[1] In January about thirty black soldiers from Dyersburg Army Air Force Base became embroiled in a shooting affray in the nearby town of Ripley, Tennessee. The exchange left one soldier dead and two civilian policemen wounded. On March 22 a group of black soldiers mutinied at Dale Mabry Field (Tallahassee), Florida, refusing to obey the commands of their superiors until their grievances, based on discrimination, were heard. Five men, all northerners, were convicted in April of inciting a mutiny and dishonorably discharged with prison sentences ranging from thirteen to fifteen years.[2]

In May another serious riot broke out. Brookley Field, located in Mobile, Alabama, served as a repair and modification depot for the Army Air Force. It was the only such installation with deep water port facilities. Built in 1940, Brookley Field housed about 15,000 soldiers and civilians, complete with the segregation of facilities and services black

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[1]The lynchings of 1944 began with the drowning death of a young boy, Willie Howard, near Live Oak, Florida, on January 2. On March 26 an elderly black man, Isaac Simmons, died at the hands of a six-man mob. On November 23, James Scales, an inmate at a Tennessee reformatory, died violently after killing the family of the Pikeville institution's superintendent. Guzman, Negro Year Book, 302-11; "Report Concerning the Lynching of James Scales, Thursday, November 23, 1944," by Z. Alexander Looby, in "Lynching--Tennessee (Scales)"; David Lanier to Spessard Holland, February 7, 1944, in "Lynching--Live Oak, Florida--Willie Howard," GOF, NAACP Papers.

[2]Pittsburgh Courier, January 8, 1944; February 12, 1944; Florence Murray, ed., The Negro Handbook, 1946-1947 (New York, 1947), 350-51; Review of proceedings, U. S. v. Pvt. Joseph R. Kent et al., August 14, 1944, in "Court Martial Cases, 1940-1947," CASW Records, RG 107.

GIs had come to loathe. Black soldiers at the base were physically isolated from the whites, for their quarters lay inside a racetrack at the Mobile County Fairgrounds. A forbidding barbed wire fence encircled the area, giving the place the aura of a stockade. The barracks had no glass in the windows; the openings were covered by shutters. Only one post exchange served the black contingent. The main bone of contention among the blacks proved, as always, the rough treatment they encountered at the hands of white MPs. Even this late in the war the Army apparently used blacks as military policemen only at bases where trouble had occurred or where it was convenient to do so. Blacks at Brookley complained loudly about being abused by white MPs and often expressed their desire for black replacements. These complaints went unheeded.[3]

Conditions in Mobile itself also left something to be desired. Accounts of discriminatory treatment and abuse at the hands of civilian policemen in the city had circulated since Brookley opened. In 1942 a white bus driver shot Private Henry Williams to death for no apparent reason, an incident that illustrated the raw feelings between white Mobilians and the black troops. The 1943 race riot aggravated the racial situation, and since then the reaction of local whites against black advancement had only intensified. The presence of Brookley Field's black soldiers threatened white control over a supposedly inferior minority group, so that GIs received the brunt of white Mobile's efforts to preserve the prewar racial

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[3]Presnell, "Impact of World War II in Mobile," 1-2, 38; J. L. LeFlore to Truman K. Gibson, June 15, 1944, in "Brookley Field," CASW Records, RG 107.

system. Since the May 1943 riot, complaints and individual incidents of white abuse of black soldiers continued.[4]

For Brookley Field's black servicemen the breaking point came on May 24, 1944. Late that night a white civilian, Marshal L. Holt, argued with a small group of black soldiers just outside the north gate to the jim crow area of the base. Holt, it seems, had been in the habit of selling bootleg gin to the men, and on this particular night while plying his trade, he made obscene remarks to the female companion of a black soldier. The soldier beat Holt soundly. The white man immediately found two white MPs and told them that a group of black soldiers had beaten and robbed him. The MPs then called for reinforcements, and two more MPs arrived shortly. They went to the scene of the alleged beating and found a group of about forty blacks congregated there waiting for a bus to Mobile. The provost marshal at Brookley arrived and immediately ordered the blacks back to their barracks, apparently so Holt's attackers could be found. Disgruntled, the blacks moved back to the "colored area" very slowly. Another directive quickly followed--that all black soldiers en route to town be returned and confined to the black area of camp. These orders, issued in response to what seemed like a rather mild offense, made the blacks angry. Once again, reaction to a breach of discipline resulted in, what appeared to blacks, heavy and unwarranted retribution.[5]

As MPs escorted Holt around the camp in an attempt to determine who thrashed and robbed him, the blacks, knowing that he was lying, grew

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[4]Presnell, "Impact of World War II in Mobile," 37.

[5]Pittsburgh Courier, June 3, 1944; Chicago Defender, June 3, 1944.

even more defensive and sullen. The contemptuous attitude of the MPs did not help matters. Seeing that the blacks were in a hostile mood, the MPs requested reinforcements, and shortly seven or eight more policemen arrived, armed with submachine guns and shotguns. A crowd of black GIs gathered just inside the gate, grumbling that "if you want to play we can play too." Within a few minutes the crowd of about seventy-five, mainly from either the 437th Aviation Squadron or the 4906th AAF Base Unit, broke into a gun room and absconded with about thirty-five rifles and twenty-five machine guns. Spasmodic shooting then broke out and continued for two hours.[6]

The firing began about midnight, and officers, hearing the reports of the rifles and quick discharges of the machine guns, headed for the area. Captain Robert Ferguson, acting as officer of the day, arrived first and implored the men to cease firing. His admonitions prompted a salvo of fire. Shortly afterward the commander of the 437th, Captain Richard Greene, arrived and shouted, "fellows, cut out the firing; I am coming in." Again, the mutineers ignored the order. Greene hoped to prevent the spread of violence, so he borrowed a machine gun from an MP and crawled to the 437th's gun room. There he met Sergeant Wellington D. Abrams, a black man, and with Captain Ferguson they quickly determined the number of weapons and quantity of ammunition missing. Greene decided to remove the remaining ammunition to a more secure location and sent

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[6]"Report of Board of Officers Appointed to Investigate the Cause, Circumstances, Facts Leading to, and Persons Involved, in a Disturbance and Disorder Occurring On or About 25 May 1944 at Brookley Field, Alabama, May 25, 1944," AG 291.21, RG 407; "Judge Advocate's Review, August 4, 1944," U. S. v. Pvt. Clarence N. Rogers et al., Case 261221, JAG Records, RG 153.

Abrams to find a jeep. Abrams left, but while he searched for a jeep a group of MPs confronted him, decided he was one of the insurgents, and shot him five times. The black sergeant, critically wounded, later received help in getting to the hospital. Greene and Ferguson continued to load the 4,000 rounds of ammunition and succeeded in moving it to the orderly room. Once there, black soldiers riddled the building trying to hit Greene, but luckily the shots struck neither the officer nor the ammunition.

At the same time the 4906th's commander, Lieutenant Howard Wisquist, attempted to calm his unit by talking to the men. As soon as he drove through the gate someone fired at least six shots in his direction, forcing him to flee from his car and jump through a window into the orderly room. While Wisquist's difficulties continued, the floodlights of the 437th and 4906th areas, hastily repaired after insurgents had damaged them, flashed on to expose the scramble. Immediately base officers conducted a roll call and a preliminary search for weapons. Brigadier General James A. Mollison, head of the Mobile Air Service Command, arrived and addressed the men. He reportedly also walked unarmed into the barracks and persuaded others to surrender their guns. At any rate the shooting quickly stopped.[7]

The next day a board of officers convened at Brookley Field to survey the situation and make recommendations. It concluded that a more

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[7]"Report of Board of Officers at Brookley Field, May 25, 1944," AG 291.21, RG 407; "Judge Advocate's Review, August 4, 1944," U. S. v. Rogers, JAG Records, RG 153; Pittsburgh Courier, June 3, 1944; Atlanta Constitution, May 26, 1944; Mobile Register, May 26, 1944; June 27, 1944.

widespread disturbance was avoided because "many of the soldiers in the two organizations are of excellent type and character." It also concluded that "there was no act or treatment by military authorities which tended to provoke a mutiny." In other words, the board found itself at a loss to explain why men with such excellent characters would incite to riot without any pretext whatever.[8]

On June 26 a general court-martial arraigned nine black soldiers, six from the 437th and three from the 4906th, on charges of violating three articles of war: the 66th, which prohibited joining a mutiny, the 67th, which prohibited failure to suppress a mutiny, and the 89th, which prohibited rioting. Each of the nine soldiers pleaded not guilty to all three charges. Without delay the defense counsel, Lieutenant Colonel Grant Richards, moved to strike the charges pertaining to the 66th and 67th Articles because they represented, in effect, double jeopardy. The soldiers could not have both joined a mutiny and also failed to suppress the same mutiny. "To permit both charges to remain," the defense pointed out, "would place each and all of the accused in double jeopardy for the same offense." The trial judge advocate overruled the motions, and the prosecution's presentation got underway.[9]

Lieutenant Colonel William McCaw, former Attorney General of Texas, served as chief prosecutor. After providing evidence verifying the length of the mutiny, the number of firearms used, and the amount of ammunition

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[8]"Report of Board of Officers at Brookley Field, May 25, 1944," AG 291.21, RG 407.

[9]"Judge Advocate's Review, August 4, 1944," U. S. v. Rogers, JAG Records, RG 153; Mobile Register, June 27, 28, 1944.

expended, McCaw called Captains Ferguson and Greene to the stand, and they testified to their roles in the incident and who they observed taking part. In addition, McCaw called a number of black soldiers who implicated each of the nine defendants as either actively taking part in the riot or carrying guns. The defense sought to discredit portions of this testimony on the grounds that it was filled with contradictions, but the statements stood as evidence. The defense also managed to introduce the testimony of eight of the nine accused men in an effort to refute the previous testimony. The ninth, Private Willie Wright, chose to remain silent. Each of the eight reaffirmed his innocence or pointed to the unfairness of the cases against them; in their opinion all of the mutineers should be tried or none at all. Private Willie Ward, for example, asserted that someone shoved a machine gun into his hands but that he laid it down, ran to the orderly room, and thereafter had nothing to do with the violence. Ward then blurted that "I ain't never had any trouble with the MPs--I ain't never been locked up in my life."[10]

During these proceedings defense counselor Richards must have realized the hopelessness of the situation, so he submitted two motions designed to get the defendants off with lighter terms. On the first, he asked the court to render not guilty verdicts for each of the accused on the charge of violating the 67th Article of War. Since the prosecution had to prove beyond doubt that the accused failed to exercise their utmost energies to suppress the riot and since there existed no ironclad proof,

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[10]Chicago Defender, July 8, 1944; Mobile Register, June 29, 1944; Presnell, "Impact of World War II in Mobile," 39-41; Testimony of Pvt. Willie Ward, Jr., U. S. v. Rogers, JAG Records, RG 153.

no one could say positively that they failed to actively aid in suppressing the mutiny. The second motion asked that all charges be dropped against Privates Enos Bailey and Edward Reese on the basis of lack of evidence. The court denied both motions.

With that the case for the defense collapsed. On June 29 the verdicts came in: the court found all nine men guilty of violating Articles 66 and 67. On the charge of violating Article 89, the court convicted five of the nine, and the other four were acquitted presumably for lack of evidence. The sentences for all nine included dishonorable discharge, forfeiture of pay, and confinement at hard labor for periods ranging from sixteen to twenty-five years. A subsequent review by the judge advocate at Brookley Field set the place of confinement as the federal penitentiary in Atlanta. On August 23, in a routine check by the Judge Advocate General's office in Washington, the legality of the trial proceedings and disposition of the cases received final approval.[11]

While the court-martial progressed, the NAACP, particularly the Mobile branch, fumed. John L. LeFlore, chairman of the chapter, inundated Truman Gibson at the War Department with letters pointing out some of the racial difficulties that had brought on the mutiny and arguing that the Army blithely ignored these factors in its investigation of the riot. "According to information made available to us," LeFlore complained, "Negro soldiers who feel that as Americans they should be treated decently, are growing tired of the sort of conditions that the War Department has

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[11]"Judge Advocate's Review, August 4, 1944"; Findings of Board of Review, Judge Advocate General's Office, August 23, 1944, U. S. v. Rogers, JAG Records, RG 153; Mobile Register, June 29, 30, 1944.

permitted to exist at Brookley Field." He pointed out the segregated and discriminatory nature of the blacks' existence there, including separate and unequal facilities and maltreatment by MPs. Gibson took note of LeFlore's complaints but promised nothing. Not easily rebuffed, LeFlore insisted that corrective action remained urgent, and he even relayed a request to Gibson on behalf of some of the soldiers asking that General Benjamin O. Davis be sent secretly to Brookley to undertake an investigation. Gibson, however, deflated black Mobile's expectations when he reported that "General Davis is out of the country so he cannot be sent." After this, LeFlore's hopes for an investigation and for the possible release of the nine soldiers on trial evaporated.[12] As summer approached, the War Department, as part of its overall effort to improve race relations, expressed concern about an increase in civilian violence. With the lessons of the previous summer in mind, Adjutant General of the Army J. A. Ulio issued on June 14 one of the department's cure-all memorandums, directing commanding generals in the domestic service commands to be wary of any unusual strain in civilian race relations. Specifically, it noted that agitation among "certain negro and white" groups, "the advent of warmer weather with consequent increase in outdoor activities," and cutbacks in war production that "may result in disproportionate economic disadvantages to the negro," served as potential causes of racial violence. To help pacify blacks and whites, the War Department could aid civilian authorities by acting in close liaison with them. It could transmit

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[12]LeFlore to Gibson, June 15, 1944; Gibson to LeFlore, June 19, 1944; LeFlore to Gibson, June 28, 1944; Gibson to LeFlore, July 22, 1944, in "Brookley Field," CASW Records, RG 107.

evidence of souring race relations, provide greater publicity for "outstanding negro performances in both the military services and industry," use qualified blacks at all levels, and avail itself more frequently of the services of Truman Gibson. These recommendations looked good on paper, yet whether officers regarded them as top priorities remained a matter of individual disposition at direct command levels. The memorandum provided another example of the Army's reliance upon a maze of directives and orders to clear up incredibly complex problems.[13]

Violence increased during the summer months of 1944 but not in the civilian sector as the War Department anticipated. A rash of military-related incidents in the South and in other areas followed closely the Brookley Field riot. No matter how many proposed changes in racial policy the department made, disorder would continue unless the Army enforced those proposals and recognized that violence was symptomatic of widespread dissatisfaction emanating from congestion and tension as well as from continued discriminatory treatment. Such violence had become a permanent part of the military experience and continued until the end of the war.

On July 15, 1944, members of two black Camp Van Dorn units, the 1697th Engineer Combat Battalion and the 394th Quartermaster Truck Company, fought a pitched battle that resulted in injuries to three soldiers and disruption of the base. The incident grew out of long-standing acrimony between the units over the use of the camp's jim crow post exchange.

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[13]Maj. Gen. J. A. Ulio to Commanding Generals, First through Ninth Service Commands, Military District of Washington, and Chiefs of Technical Services, June 14, 1944, in "Reports--Racial Tension," ibid.

That this incident involved combat between two black units made it unusual and showed that hostility between units did not necessarily have to involve racial problems. In this case, as in some others, military routine, the nature of camp life, and a series of minor irritants led to intraracial rioting. A court-martial in mid-August convicted nine black soldiers of violating the 89th Article of War, but by mid-1945 most had been restored to active duty.[14]

As the summer progressed race relations in southern military bases appeared to regress, for in mid-August violence revisited Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. Congested by six military installations, the area festered with racial violence throughout the war, both in the various military camps and in Alexandria. Relations had not improved since the riot of January 1942 and the Raymond Carr killing the following November. The Army's attempts to calm this situation succeeded in quelling potential race riots but failed to get at the heart of white civilian-black soldier difficulties. One soldier captured the attitudes of many blacks GIs toward the situation, asserting that his regiment was "never able to please no one. It is hell living hell here, but when we seek information, we are then almost in guard house." This soldier and his cohorts had reason to complain, for during the first half of 1944, three black soldiers reportedly died at the hands of whites. In addition, Brigadier General Louis F. Guerre, the new camp commander who had previously served as the superintendent of the Louisiana State Police, expressed racist views

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[14]Court-martial proceedings, August 11, 1944; "Data for Clemency Consideration," former Pvt. Johnnie B. Felton, May 27, 1946, U. S. v. Sgt. Fred R. Hunter et al., Case 265598, JAG Records, RG 153.

immediately upon his arrival, and reportedly told a group of officers that he had been charged with clearing up the racial situation. Conditions within the camp proved harsh for blacks, for some of the white officers in command of black troops vented their hostility and frustration on their men, producing a state of distrust. The situation degenerated to the point that the camp's commanding officers deemed it necessary to station a white unit at a certain spot each night, armed with gas masks and riot guns, ready for outbreaks between black soldiers and whites. Officers also conducted frequent shakedowns to discover hidden weapons among the blacks, placed a heavy guard at the motor pool, and assigned extra guards to the black area of camp.[15]

On August 8 a black soldier allegedly raped the wife of a white soldier at Claiborne, and six days later a black GI reportedly attacked an elderly white woman in the vicinity. Thoroughly aroused, local whites formed a posse and combed the woods surrounding camp three separate times between August 8 and August 16, intimidating every black soldier they encountered. This bullying caused even further deterioration of race relations, and black troops began to feel as though redress could only come if they, like the whites, took matters into their own hands.

On the afternoon of August 16 a rumor spread through the black area of camp that members of the white posse had attacked and shot four black soldiers. Members of the black units milled around and grew increasingly

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[15]"Privates of 364th" to Pittsburgh Courier, March 6, 1943, in "Camp Claiborne"; Commanding General, Eighth Service Command, to War Department, August 24, 1944, in "Racial Situation--Camp Claiborne, Internal Sec. Div., 1942-45," CASW Records, RG 107; Pittsburgh Courier, October 7, 1944; Memorandum, Tabitha Petran to Walter White, undated, in "Claiborne," GOF, NAACP Papers.

boisterous. Sergeant Conway F. Price of the 1327th Engineer General Service Regiment noticed around dusk that men of his unit had somehow procured weapons, but since they appeared calm and orderly, he did not consider the matter serious.

Around 10:00 p.m. the situation got out of hand.[16] The commanding officer of the 1327th happened upon about two hundred black GIs who had procured several trucks and decided to drive to the area where they heard that the four soldiers had been shot. The commander told them that the rumor was untrue and that whites had shot no one. The troops refused to believe him. Recognizing the damage that might result if they left without supervision, the officer climbed into one of the vehicles and led them to the scene where they satisfied themselves that no shooting incident had occurred. The convoy then returned to camp about 11:30 p.m., and the men returned the trucks to the motor pool. Two hours later, however, men of the 1328th Engineer Regiment commandeered ten vehicles and, fully armed, clambered aboard in preparation for action. No disturbance occurred, and the soldiers soon released the trucks.

Because of the display of arms, regimental commanders began a check of the various storage rooms. The orderly room of the 1355th Dump Truck Company had been ransacked. While the officers stood there, a mob of forty to fifty blacks began firing into the building; the officers escaped injury, but a white enlisted man accompanying them was hit. The mob ordered one of the officers, Captain James Harper, out of the

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[16]Commanding General, Eighth Service Command, to War Department, August 25, 1944, in "Racial Situation--Camp Claiborne, Internal Sec. Div., 1942-45," CASW Records, RG 107.

building where Private Leroy McGary jabbed him in the stomach with his bayoneted rifle and threatened him. A lieutenant left the orderly room only to be clubbed. The group then marched to the hospital where the insurgents deposited the lieutenant. At that point a jeep containing two white MPs and an officer arrived, but the mob quickly disarmed them, lined them up, and beat them thoroughly. Two or three other whites who happened by received similar treatment. The mob then drifted over to a dispensary, and amid sporadic shooting and shouting, one of them harangued the others about all the injustices they suffered while at camp. A white officer then demanded that the troops disperse. Instead, the mob threatened to kill him and beat him so badly that he suffered a concussion.[17]

Following this incident, the violence stopped; luckily no one had been killed. The black soldiers who participated achieved revenge against what they perceived as a long and dreary chain of insults by white civilians and the seeming insensitivity of military authorities. Mindful of the probable consequences, they sought redress in the only way they considered effective.

The commanding officers at the camp as well as the headquarters of the Eighth Service Command in Dallas acted quickly. Coming on the heels of other mutinous conduct, the Claiborne riot served as yet another instance of unruly blacks deliberately violating military discipline. Without delay officials arrested thirty-seven men and confined all but ten of them at Camp Livingston. Eventually the War Department brought

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[17] Ibid.; Memorandum, Lt. Morris Weller, September 25, 1944; Findings of Board of Review, Judge Advocate General's Office, November 24, 1944, U. S. v. Pvt. Leroy R. McGary and Pvt. William Smith, Jr., Case 265399, JAG Records, RG 153; Alexandria Town Talk, August 17, 18, 1944.

fourteen of them before courts-martial. In addition, the black soldier who allegedly attacked two white women in early and mid-August was arrested and confessed.[18]

The trials convened in mid-September at Camp Claiborne. On September 16, Private Leroy McGary, who had acted as one of the ring-leaders in the disturbance, stood trial. Previous convictions led the Army to regard him as a "bad influence on his associates." McGary asserted his innocence, protesting that "I didn't participate in none of that trouble," but the Army obviously did not believe him. The evidence against McGary proved incontrovertible, so after the court found him guilty it sentenced him to death. A few days later the trial of Sergeant Conway F. Price convened. Price took no part in the violence, but the prosecution charged that he had been negligent in trying to suppress the mutiny. Price, whose four-year service record was spotless, told the court that he tried to find superior officers to issue him instructions, but when this proved unsuccessful, he returned to his barracks. The court convicted him and sentenced him to dishonorable discharge and nine years' imprisonment. The NAACP filed arguments for both McGary and Price before a Judge Advocate General's Board of Review and succeeded in getting McGary's death sentence reduced to forty years. Price merited full restoration to duty in 1945. Thus, the Army showed through stiff penalties that it would not tolerate mutiny, but quietly reduced the punishment after making its point.[19]

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[18]Gibson to White, September 30, 1944, in "Claiborne," GOF, NAACP Papers.

[19]Lt. Col. Don T. Udall to Commanding General, Camp Claiborne, September 7, 1944; Testimony of Pvt. Leroy McGary, September 16, 1944; Findings of Board of Review, Judge Advocate General's Office, November 24,

Besides McGary and Price, the court convicted eleven other soldiers and acquitted one. It dishonorably discharged the eleven and dealt out sentences ranging from twenty-five years to life imprisonment. McGary remained the only defendant who received the death sentence, and Price's nine-year sentence proved the lightest of the thirteen convicted.[20]

The Camp Claiborne episode was the last of the serious military racial outbreaks of the war. Incidents of this nature, however, continued to plague the South. In September a clash occurred at Camp Livingston, Louisiana, followed in October by a riot at Camp Patrick Henry, near Hampton Roads, Virginia. In 1945 there were a number of racial incidents, but they increasingly took place between returning black veterans and white civilians rather than in military camps as had been the case since mid-1943.[21]

In the spring of 1945 the Army again issued dire forecasts of impending racial violence for the summer months. This time, fortunately, tensions subsided, and conflict involving the military, or for that matter civilians, did not emerge as a major problem. Yet the national

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1944; Memorandum by Maj. Gen. Richard Donovan, April 16, 1945, U. S. v. McGary and Smith; Testimony of Sgt. Conway F. Price, September 25, 1944; Memorandum, Lt. David W. Johnston, October 10, 1944; "Memorandum on Behalf of Sergeant Conway F. Price," undated, by Thurgood Marshall and Edward F. Dudley; Findings of Board of Review, Judge Advocate General's Office, February 17, 1945, U. S. v. Sgt. Conway F. Price, Case 266171, JAG records, RG 153; Dudley to Lt. Col. Fletcher R. Andrews, October 13, 1944; Marshall to Henry L. Stimson, November 3, 1944; Maj. Gen. Edward F. Witsell to Dudley, October 29, 1945, in "Claiborne," GOF, NAACP Papers; Murray, Negro Handbook, 1946-1947, pp. 352-53; Pittsburgh Courier, October 21, 1944.

[20] Pittsburgh Courier, October 14, 1944.

[21] Ibid., April 21, 1945; May 12, 1945; June 30, 1945; July 14, 1945; Murray, Negro Handbook, 1946-1947, p. 349.

mood proved one of suspenseful waiting.[22]

The riots at Brookley Field, Camp Claiborne, and elsewhere ended the violence that had plagued southern military bases. From the beginning of the conflict to mid-1943, clashes between black soldiers and southern whites epitomized the collision of two conflicting views about what the war meant. To blacks, it meant taking advantage of the abnormality of the period to seek political and economic gains and as soldiers to realize the dignity and respect due them. For southern whites, the war represented internal as well as external threats to the solidarity and consistency of southern life. Black soldiers threatened the status quo, and in striving to achieve victory many of the region's whites also tried to maintain the impregnability of the color line. As the majority and as the holders of power, they prevailed. This conflict helped lead to a change in the nature of military-related racial violence. From mid-1943 through 1944 many black troops became more aggressive and thus more prone to mutinous action. Blacks saw violence and everyday degradation grow so intolerable that many of them sought redress in the most radical and direct way possible. Their actions represented the desperation of a group shocked and embittered by the treatment accorded them. Their violent acts, however, only served to bring more intense hostility from whites, a development that appeared outrageous to black GIs since whites seemed to them responsible for causing the violence through continual race-baiting and discrimination. Neither the War Department nor most white Americans understood the nature of this vicious cycle.

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[22]Memorandum, Col. E. W. Gruhn to the Adjutant General, April 16, 1945, AG 291.2, RG 407.

In the wake of the military violence of 1944 and early 1945 the South and the nation at large began giving increased attention to the end of the war and some of the domestic problems peace would bring. Even though full military production continued furiously as the Allies swept into Germany and hopped across the islands of the South and Central Pacific toward Japan, by D-Day in mid-1944 the outcome of the war appeared settled and its end a matter of time. The "arsenal of democracy" maintained its full flow of war goods up to Germany's surrender in May 1945, but, as the eventual outcome grew more obvious, many people focused on postwar America and the complex problems of demobilization and reconversion. While the conflict lasted over a year longer, domestic America by mid-1944 could rest easier knowing that the end was in sight. People looked forward to a prosperous, peacetime America, and events during the last two years of the war focused increasingly on that transition and the problems it contained.

One of the problems that always threatened to become a major difficulty in periods of change was race relations. As early as mid-1944 warnings of widespread violence during reconversion emerged from a number of sources. An August 1944 University of Denver national opinion poll revealed that 63 percent of the white people contacted believed that race relations would prove worse in postwar America while only 37 percent thought they would improve.[23] At about the same time sociologist Charles S. Johnson, one of the nation's most informed men on race relations, wrote a series of articles about the existing and future status of southern racial discord. There were precedents for widespread violence

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[23]"Racial Explosive," Newsweek, August 21, 1944, p. 39.

after the war if positive programs did not emerge in the era of transition. "There is fairly widespread agreement that race relations in the South have deteriorated in character since the beginning of the war," he observed. During a ten month period in 1943, he counted 111 racial incidents in the South "of sufficient importance to be given attention in the national press." While the number decreased during 1944, this violence reflected social, economic, and political changes which could prove worthwhile in the long run even if they fostered hostility in the short run. Johnson tried to find a silver lining in the racial situation but admitted that "the whole question of race relations, not only in the South but in the country as a whole, is being held in a kind of suspension awaiting the end of the war and the unpredictable developments which will follow." Careful planning and constructive action could avert an interracial bloodbath.[24]

In the same vein George S. Schuyler of the Pittsburgh Courier warned that "the problem of race relations in the United States is rapidly approaching the boiling point." If fundamental changes did not occur, such as creation of a permanent FEPC, abolition of residential segregation, and desegregation of the armed forces, racial violence would surely surface at the end of the war. Open racial conflict in postwar America, Schuyler cautioned, would doubtless occur if "white demagogues and timorous or complacent public officials" combined to support a return to the prewar system of rigid adherence to the color line. If white mobs, "resenting these few Negro gains, decide to take the law into

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[24]Johnson, "Present Status of Race Relations," 27; idem, "Social Changes and Their Effects on Race Relations in the South," ibid. (March 1945), 344, 348.

their own hands," the postwar conflict would make that of the war years "look tame." Another writer, fearing postwar repression and unemployment, warned that unless forces of reconciliation between blacks and whites quickly appeared, "strikes, riots and bloodshed may be expected to recur."[25]

Some periodicals, like A Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations, devoted entire issues to the projected postwar racial situation. One article asserted that the immediate postwar months would prove whether race relations organizations could cope with the changes in black-white status that war had wrought. The article suggested that expanded activity on the local level might foster better relations. If these plans did not materialize, it warned, "the country may well be blown apart." Another article in the same issue pointed out that of the 700,000 black veterans planning to re-enter the domestic economy at a time when it stood likely to slump, 400,000 planned to return to the South. This, of course, would create economic as well as racial difficulties, especially if the veterans brought with them notions of equal opportunity.[26]

In the midst of this discussion the nation began confronting the staggering problems of demobilization and reconversion. During the war, Congress appropriated $433 billion for the nation's victory effort, and the government quickly became the major buyer in the private production

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[25]George S. Schuyler, "The Negro Problem Reaches a Crisis: More Race Riots are Coming," American Mercury, 59 (December 1944), 686, 689-91; John H. Burma, "Tomorrow's Race Riots," Christian Century, March 21, 1945, pp. 364-65.

[26]A. A. Liveright, "Reconversion--A Challenge to Race Relations Committees," Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations, 3 (August-September 1945), 18-23; William A. Caudill, "Negro Veterans Return," ibid., 14-17.

sector. With the end of the conflict, though, the government had to turn the economy back to an essentially private venture. Few people in 1945 realized that the rapid deterioration of Soviet-American relations would stem the overall plan for complete demobilization, but even with the Cold War, reconversion to a peacetime footing remained an absolute necessity. From the somewhat abrupt conclusion of the war in September 1945 to the end of the year federal munitions contracts plummeted from $40 to $13 billion. In the same period the government released about 5.4 million servicemen and expected them to re-enter the economy. By the beginning of 1946 over three million people could not find jobs, a problem that seemed almost calamitous since it followed a period when the unemployment rate had dropped to the lowest level in years. Jobs became more scarce even though many peacetime industries, such as housing and automobiles, absorbed much of the veteran glut, and many housewives quit their wartime jobs and returned to normal activities. The Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion (OWMR) summarized the drastic effects of inflation, unemployment, and related problems by cautioning that "we cannot afford an economic Pearl Harbor."[27]

The postwar economic situation rapidly became muddled, and this had a decided effect on the way people lived. In the South, economists exhibited their concern over the situation by meeting at Atlanta in mid-April 1945 under the auspices of the Southern Regional Council. Leading

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[27]Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion, Battle for Production: Fifth Report to the President, the Senate, and the House of Representatives, January 1, 1946 (Washington, 1946), 4-8, 22. Copy in Papers of the Southern Regional Council, Box 22, Atlanta, Georgia (hereafter cited as SRC Papers).

authorities noted that the region's economy still lagged behind the rest of the nation. One-third of the country's workers whose income fell below the national average lived in the South. The region's taxpayers paid a lower per capita income tax than the rest of the nation. The South contained 42 percent of the nation's housing regarded as "needing major repairs." Despite the economic boom the South experienced during the war, the overall statistics remained disheartening. Ten southern states containing 15 percent of the nation's land area, 14 percent of its minerals, 10 percent of its industries, and 39 percent of its farm population still received only 11 percent of the national income and 20 percent of the national farm income. These states gained less from war contracts than any other area. By 1943, for example, the South's manufactures had increased over 1939 by a smaller amount than any other region, 69 percent. Other sections, by comparison, witnessed jumps of anywhere from 227 percent to 639 percent. The conferees could only conclude that while the South had benefited from the war, the gains appeared extremely modest. The potential for an economic upswing existed, but progress, as always, would remain slow. The South's substantial black population stood to benefit least from any such development.[28]

Economic recession contributed heavily to southern white alarm over the position of blacks in the immediate postwar period. Having been forced to accept modest advancements for blacks during the international crisis, whites exhibited fears that such political and economic

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[28]Program for "A Conference on the South's Post War Economy," April 11-12, 1945, SRC Papers, Box 54.

gains might lead to permanent and far-reaching alterations in southern race relations, even seriously endangering the color line. During the confusion that enveloped the end of the war and preliminary reconversion efforts, southern whites began turning increased attention to this problem, determined to return to the prewar racial status quo.

Congressional debates over the FEPC indicated the lengths to which much of the southern white majority would go to ensure regional control of the postwar racial situation. As early as 1944 the FEPC ran into serious difficulty, and in the 1945 debates over the next fiscal year's appropriation southern white concerns over the status of blacks in the postwar South emerged. During June 1945 the FEPC appropriation disappeared from the House bill, and in the Senate Dennis Chavez of New Mexico tried to restore it. In the end the Senate provided $250,000 for the committee, as compared with a presidential request of $599,000. The FEPC thus remained alive only in skeleton form for one more year.[29]

In the midst of the Senate debate over the FEPC appropriation some southerners used the occasion to complain not only about the committee but the dangers of black advancement. James O. Eastland of Mississippi, for example, charged that the FEPC "is a part of the Communist program for racial amalgamation in the United States." While on the subject of race relations Eastland enlarged the scope of his discussion, which amounted to a filibuster. Turning to perhaps the most sensitive point of all, black servicemen, he stated that "the Negro soldier was an utter and dismal failure in combat in Europe. When I make that statement, it

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[29]Ruchames, Race, Jobs, and Politics, 120-29.

is not from prejudice. I am not prejudiced against the Negro (laughter in the galleries)." Then, echoing a widely-held fear among many southern whites that represented a major cause of future racial violence, he complained that "by the pending measure we are actually asked to discriminate against the white war veteran, and give the Negro preference over him."[30]

Even though the FEPC's death seemed more lamentable to blacks than it really was given its limited powers, the debates themselves proved more harmful to race relations since they inflamed sensibilities and portended continued strained relations. White reactions to the filibustering by southern senators reflected similar fears of permanent black advancement in postwar months, while black reaction proved uniformly negative since such statements threatened to erase wartime gains, however modest they may have been. One black soldier, in reference to Theodore G. Bilbo's part in the FEPC debates, clumsily but forcefully requested that the senator "recall to his Stupid memories that Gettsburg Address by lincoln and he Should also try to learn that the Negro is no longer the ignorant whom his ancestors had to pick their cotton." Thus the lines of conflict had been drawn between two racial groups whose ideas toward the color line stood at opposite poles.[31]

In the wake of the Congressional furor over the FEPC a series of racial incidents occurred. They served as warning signs of what upcoming

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[30]U. S., Congress, Senate, Congressional Record, 79th Cong., 1st sess., 91, pt. 5, pp. 6992, 6994-95; New York Times, June 30, 1945, p. 9.

[31]"Southern Senators Play with Fire," Christian Century, July 11, 1945, p. 805; Pvt. Solomon L. Rhoden to NAACP, July [?], 1945, in "Soldier Letters re: Bilbo and Eastland," GOF, NAACP Papers.

months held for black southerners, especially veterans. Economic recession, continued poor race relations, and a conflict of ideas over the black position in the postwar South led to a resurgence of violence that began in late 1945 and lasted through 1946. The upsurge of disorder acted as a final, bitter blow to southern blacks as the color line emerged triumphant. The return to the region of about 400,000 black veterans served as the focus of controversy, for to whites they represented the core of potential trouble, while to blacks they would hopefully act as a vanguard for permanent gains. The violence this conflict produced saw southern blacks returned to "virtually the same position they had been in before the war. They were still politically impotent and . . . were totally segregated by law and custom from the white population."[32]

On August 25, 1945, Eugene Bells fell prey to a small band of whites near Liberty, Mississippi. Bells was a sharecropper and veteran who, upon his return from the service, flaunted his freedom by going to work for his father-in-law rather than his former employer, a white man. In retaliation the white farmer and several companions abducted Bells on the night of August 25, drove to a swamp, and killed him. The incident did not become public knowledge until a year later when one of Bells' friends mustered the nerve to tell the story. The NAACP tried to initiate legal action but failed.[33]

Two months later, on October 11, a white mob lynched Jesse J. Payne near Madison, Florida. Again, the tragedy involved a black

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[32]Charles P. Roland, The Improbable Era: The South Since World War II (Lexington, 1975), 30-31.

[33]Pittsburgh Courier, June 29, 1946.

sharecropper who defied his white employer and thus racial etiquette. The white man, D. L. Goodwin, apparently responded by spreading a story involving Payne's rape of a five-year-old white girl. Payne was quickly indicted for the crime and placed in the county jail, but during the early morning darkness of October 11 the jailer allowed a mob to kidnap the prisoner. The whites drove him to an isolated location and riddled his body with bullets. Since the jailer had acted as an accessory to the lynching, the Justice Department investigated for evidence of a violation of federal civil liberties. A conspiracy of silence faced agents, however, forcing the department to drop the matter.[34]

In 1946 southern race relations remained raw, aggravated by the return of both black and white veterans, the continued confusion of demobilization and reconversion, and the friction generated by conflicting ideas along racial lines regarding black status in politics and the economy. The beating and blinding of Isaac Woodard in Batesburg, South Carolina, further reflected the nature of things to come. Woodard, a veteran of four years who saw action in the South Pacific, received his honorable discharge on the morning of February 13, 1946. The same day, while on his way to New York, the bus on which he rode stopped in Batesburg. Woodard had evidently irritated the driver, who called the police. Lynwood Shull, the town's police chief, arrived and beat the new veteran

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[34] Ibid., October 20, 1945; November 3, 1945; "Crime and Punishment," Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations, 3 (October 1945), 75; ibid. (November 1945), 107; J. Tom Watson to Millard F. Caldwell, October 23, 1945; Theron L. Caudle to J. Edgar Hoover, October 16, 1945; Turner L. Smith to the files, November 6, 1945, Justice Department Records; Caudle to Marshall, November 5, 1945; Affidavits of Lucy Payne, Lillie Mae Payne, and Lucy Mae Anderson, October 29, 1945, in "Lynching General (1945)," GOF, NAACP Papers.

so severely that he permanently blinded him and then refused to provide him medical treatment for a day following the injury. Enraged, the NAACP picked up the Woodard case and, though no legal redress came of its action, the association made a cause celebre of it. Attempting to show the injustices being done to black veterans in the South, the NAACP worked up considerable publicity through Woodard's misfortune.[35]

The incidents of late 1945 and early 1946 served as both cause and effect in the general worsening of southern race relations. Their occurrence and the publicity generated by them fostered hostility on both sides of the color line. Whites suspected further breaches of racial tradition while blacks viewed them as additional signs of hypocrisy since the nation had helped defeat fascism abroad but practiced it toward minorities. These incidents came from conditions in the postwar South that made such delicate issues as black advancement even more sensitive and caused its actual importance to be blown out of proportion.

From 1944 through 1945 the United States managed to end the bloodiest of all wars but then faced the monumental problems of reconversion. Serious military clashes came to an end during this period, partly through overdue War Department policy changes, but more directly because the war ended. At the same time, however, civilian violence began to escalate. Latent suspicions among blacks and whites toward each other surfaced in the postwar South and, accompanying the instability that characterized

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[35]"Along the NAACP Battlefront," Crisis, 53 (September 1946), 276; ibid. (November 1946), 341; Affidavit of Isaac Woodard, April 23, 1946; T. Gillis Nutter to Marshall, November 14, 1947, in "Woodard, Isaac v. Atlantic Greyhound Bus Company," LF, NAACP Papers; Pittsburgh Courier, October 5, 1946; November 16, 1946.

periods of change, caused a resurgence of racial violence. Blacks, who at first perceived the postwar months as a period of opportunity, quickly became disillusioned as the violence subverted their hopes. They continued to suffer as 1946 progressed.

CHAPTER VIII

"TERROR IN TENNESSEE"

On February 25, 1946, a fist fight between two World War II veterans rapidly developed into an incident that became the most significant racial outbreak of the immediate postwar era. The Columbia, Tennessee, race riot reflected the confusion and tension of a period when the nation stood at midstream in its efforts to reconvert from war to peace. It also confirmed fears that black southerners, especially veterans, would attempt to maintain the modest gains achieved during the war, thus precipitating a reaction by elements of the white South. If the lynchings of late 1945 indicated a general worsening of regional race relations, the Columbia riot confirmed the trend. That the riot occurred in an obscure Middle Tennessee town rather than in a bulging metropolis made the incident in a sense even more significant. As Walter White later observed, "the violent outburst had developed out of circumstances which were so simple and ordinary that the extent of the damage done was a remarkable barometer of the fear and prejudice which haunted the community." Such racial tension, it might be added, plagued the entire South.[1]

Even though the riot proved small compared with the Beaumont or Detroit incidents, and although the main violence came only when lawmen entered the black section of the town, the episode's reverberations lasted through mid-1947 and involved a number of legal and organizational experiences that made it as significant as those of 1943. What the NAACP called

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[1]White, A Man Called White, 310.

"terror in Tennessee" represented in microcosm the continuing struggle in the South over the color line.

Columbia served as the seat of Maury County and lay about forty miles south of Nashville. Of the county's 40,000 residents about 12,000 were black, and the city counted 3,000 in its total population of about 8,000. The county had lost almost 9 percent of its population during the war. Dairy farming and other agricultural pursuits dominated the area's economy, and Columbia was noted as a mule-trading center. During the war the Monsanto and Victor Chemical Companies had built plants in nearby Mt. Pleasant, so for many county residents these factories replaced the tractor and plow. The plants' workers had organized with an affiliate of the CIO, and the black employees in both businesses had worked for the abolition of the jim crow pay differential.[2]

Within Columbia and Maury County race relations exhibited a mixture of progressivism and reaction. On the one hand many black residents prospered, either as farmers or through wartime employment. Blacks were also active in county politics, so economically and politically racial harmony seemed to prevail. Yet on the other hand two lynchings had occurred in the county within the past twenty years, and the black community was in most ways rigidly segregated. In fact, blacks inhabited five distinct enclaves in the city, and the business district carried the unwelcome name of "Mink Slide." It lay just east of the courthouse square on Eighth

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[2]Memorandum on Columbia, Tennessee, undated, FBI Records; Dorothy Sue Beeler, "Race Riot in Columbia, Tennessee, February 25-26, 1946" (M. A. Thesis, Middle Tennessee State University, 1972), 7; Guzman, Negro Year Book, 249; U. S., Bureau of the Census, "Civilian Population by Counties: November 1, 1943," pp. 3-5.

Street, between Main and Woodland Streets, and consisted of "cafes, drug stores, barber shops, pool rooms, a lodge hall, funeral establishment, ice plant, shoe store, pressing establishment, and a church." The black residential areas carried such titles as "Macedonia" and "Happy Hollow" (see Figure 3).[3]

In 1946 the tranquility that appeared to characterize Columbia in fact masked deep-seated racial hostility. The source of this acrimony lay in a lack of interracial communication that produced "latent mutual suspicion." As so often characterized southern race relations, the actions of one race was seen in a different, and usually negative, connotation by the other. Columbia possessed no interracial committee at any level, so the black and white communities relied on assumptions, rumors, and the conservative Columbia Daily Herald in forming their conceptions of each other. Most whites clung to the color line in striving to maintain segregated public facilities and in stereotyping blacks as immoral, irresponsible, and inferior beings. Blacks, on the other hand, read the Chicago Defender, and their conception of the duplicity of America's war aims grew increasingly bitter. One leader in the community, seventy-six-year-old Julius Blair, boycotted the town's picture show because he could not use the "white" entrance and urged others to follow suit. To blacks, Blair's actions served as a measure of maintaining pride and integrity. To whites, Blair seemed an old, cranky troublemaker. Such mutual distrust heightened as black and white veterans returned to the town, since both groups brought with them ideas and attitudes that boded ill for harmonious relations.[4]

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[3]Memorandum on Columbia, FBI Records; Guzman, Negro Year Book, 248-49.

[4]"The Social Front: Violence," Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations, 3 (March 1946), 235-36; Ernest F. Smith, "Report on Investigation Made on February 27-28, 1946, at Columbia, Tennessee, by Ernest F. Smith, Assistant Attorney General of Tennessee, with Reference

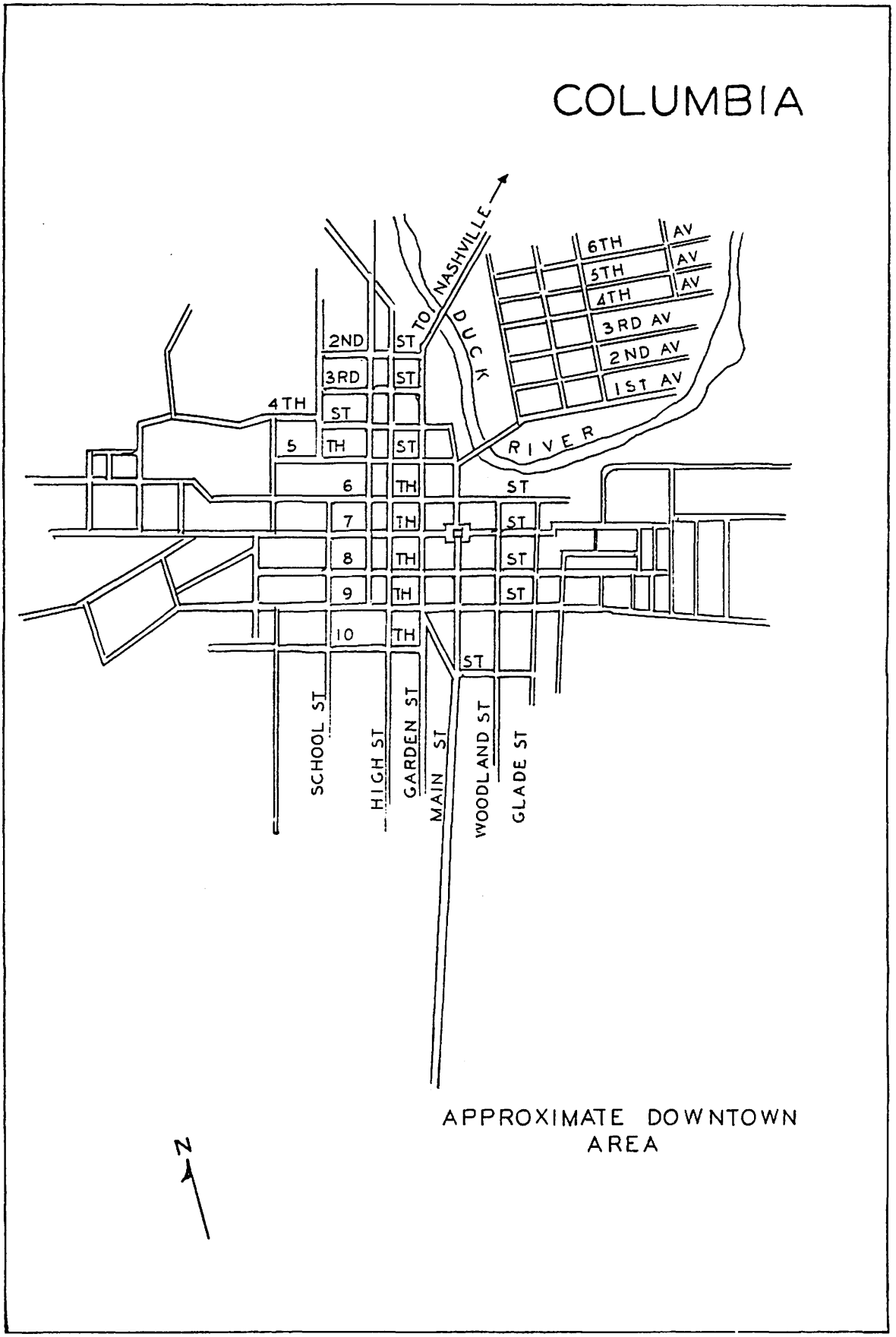


Figure 3. Map of Columbia, Tennessee.

Significantly, conflict between two veterans brought Columbia's race relations to the boiling point. On Monday, February 25, two black Columbians, Mrs. Gladys Stephenson and her son James, visited the radio repair shop at the Castner-Knott department store which faced the courthouse square in the central business district. Mrs. Stephenson had left the radio there several months before and returned to retrieve it and pay the repair bill. A white employee, Will Fleming, informed her that the radio had been mistakenly sold to someone else. Irked, the black woman told others in the store not to deal with Castner-Knott. Fleming promptly asked her to leave and then either cursed or struck her. Defending his mother, James Stephenson hit Fleming and then the men, both veterans, moved outside where they pummeled each other. Stephenson pushed Fleming through a plate glass window, causing a severe gash, and this attracted considerable attention. At that point two policemen arrived, broke up the fight, and charged the blacks with disturbing the peace. Friends took Fleming to the county hospital where he remained overnight.[5]

John Fleming, the injured man's father, considered the charge against the Stephensons entirely too lenient. Because the Flemings were a powerful Columbia family, he succeeded in having the blacks charged with attempted murder. Meanwhile citizens in the black community learned of the incident and four black leaders, headed by Julius Blair, raised the necessary $3500 bond and secured the Stephensons' release. Rumors flew

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to the Disturbance on the Night of February 25th," Jim Nance McCord Papers, Box 18, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville.

[5]Beeler, "Race Riot in Columbia," 14-16; Theron L. Caudle to J. Edgar Hoover, March 4, 1946, FBI Records.

around the black community that whites would try to lynch them, so friends took James Stephenson to Nashville and then sent him to a relative's home in Chicago. Other blacks, headed by recently returned veterans, armed themselves in preparation for the purported lynching attempt.[6]

At the same time local whites grew excited as rumors floated across town that the black community was preparing for a race riot. About fifty whites, most of them armed, gathered at the county jail and demanded that Sheriff J. J. Underwood release Stephenson to their custody. Underwood responded by arresting two of them, both drunk, and the mob broke up. Other whites armed themselves while speculation continued over developments in Mink Slide and other black enclaves. During this period the police force, which consisted of a chief, J. Walker Griffin, and six patrolmen, cruised through the town trying to calm tempers and disarm citizens. On at least one occasion Chief Griffin drove to Mink Slide and assured the blacks that nothing would happen to them, a reassurance that they did not wholeheartedly accept.[7]

By nightfall sporadic gunfire started. Snipers shot out the street lights in the Mink Slide area. Within the black district businessmen and their friends waited and wondered. Around 9:00 p.m. Chief Griffin and three policemen drove to the edge of Mink Slide and began walking down a street. Someone ordered them to halt but they continued forward. In the darkness several blacks, feeling threatened, fired at the four officers with shotguns, peppering all of them and seriously injuring one. Griffin,

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[6]Beeler, "Race Riot in Columbia," 14-19.

[7]Ibid.; Memorandum, H. H. Clegg to Hoover, April 30, 1946; Caudle to Hoover, March 4, 1946, FBI Records.

shocked at this unprovoked attack, limped back to his office, and city officials hurriedly telephoned Governor Jim Nance McCord. The governor immediately dispatched seventy-five state troopers and five hundred state guardsmen from five neighboring cities. The first of these reinforcements arrived at 10:00 p.m.

In the meantime both blacks and whites jumped to conclusions. To many blacks it seemed that the whites, including the police, were preparing to storm Mink Slide in search of James Stephenson and that unless they offered resistance a full scale riot might level the area. To whites, the armed resistance that resulted in injuries to four city police officers confirmed their worst fears. The situation had become critical, as black veterans seemed to advocate open rebellion. The initiative rested with the city administration, and its desperate call for help attested to the confused and dangerous state of affairs. While blacks considered a riot imminent, whites thought the riot had already begun.[8]

During the night Tennessee's commissioner of public safety, Lynn Bomar, and General Jacob M. Dickinson, head of the state guard, arrived in Columbia and conferred with Chief Griffin, Sheriff Underwood, and Mayor Eldridge Denham. They decided to wait until dawn to take action. In the interim lawmen formed a cordon around Mink Slide; sporadic shooting continued. Two white civilians received slight injuries, and officers arrested five armed blacks attempting to escape the area. The blacks in Mink Slide could only imagine what would occur at daybreak, for they knew that troops had arrived and that something unpleasant loomed ahead.

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[8]Clegg to Hoover, April 30, 1946, FBI Records; Beeler, "Race Riot in Columbia," 19-21.

Shortly before 6:00 a.m. on February 26 officers moved into the area with orders to confiscate weapons and detain resistors. Apparently no one considered issuing search warrants, but such a formality would probably have made little difference in the nature of the operation. Some of the law officers proceeded in orderly fashion through the area, but others seemed to regard their responsibilities as a way of teaching blacks a lesson. They kicked down doors, ransacked businesses, and fired indiscriminately into buildings. Blacks who had barricaded themselves returned the fire. The defenders injured three state troopers while the officers shot several blacks. During the operation the lawmen wrecked portions of Mink Slide in their search for suspected caches of firearms and unruly blacks. James Morton's funeral home, Sol Blair's barber shop, and Julius Blair's drug store suffered the worst damage. All three of these men were leaders in the black community. At Morton's establishment overzealous lawmen thoroughly destroyed the furnishings and ruined five caskets worth $1,725. On one of the caskets the letters "KKK" had been crudely lettered with plaster of paris powder. The barber shop was thoroughly perforated with bullet holes, and the drug store suffered similar damage. Property damages eventually totaled between $30,000 and $50,000.[9]

As the invasion continued officers took about thirty blacks into custody. Lawmen found several blacks in a back room of Blair's barber shop and arrested them on charges of attempted murder. Some received

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[9]Beeler, "Race Riot in Columbia," 24-26; Clegg to Hoover, April 30, 1946; "Inspection of Property Damage--Mink Slide Area," undated, FBI Records; Smith, "Report on Investigation," McCord Papers; Pittsburgh Courier, April 20, 1946.

injuries as officers apprehended them and marched them to the county jail. Authorities found about twenty guns. As this early morning operation concluded, Lynn Bomar drove through the stricken area in a sound truck, imploring the blacks to go home and stop causing trouble, assuring them that no further violence would occur. At one point Bomar revealed his condescending attitude by saying, "let me see you smile. Come on, smile." Not surprisingly, those within earshot failed to see the humor in the situation and did not appreciate his assumption that smiling faces would end the crisis.[10]

Shortly after the initial operation Bomar, Dickinson, Underwood, and U. S. District Attorney Paul F. Bumpus conferred and agreed that another search of the area was needed. After getting permission from the governor and attorney general, the sheriff deputized 120 troopers and guardsmen and sent them back to Mink Slide. By this time the blacks had submitted to the overwhelming force and sullenly watched as the officers indiscriminately searched buildings in both Mink Slide and adjacent white areas. They ultimately collected about 250 firearms, an arsenal that officials took considerable pride in displaying. Though the weapons came from both black and white homes and businesses, to support the popular theory that a conspiracy existed among the black citizens, the lawmen insisted that all were found in Mink Slide. The clean-up operation continued through Thursday, February 28, and ultimately officers arrested

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[10]Clegg to Hoover, April 30, 1946; Interview by FBI with Lloyd Kennedy, March 5, 1946, FBI Records; "Terror in Mink Slide," Newsweek, March 11, 1946, pp. 28-29; Memorandum, James E. Ruffin to Caudle, March 11, 1946, Justice Department Records.

ninety-eight blacks and the two whites that Sheriff Underwood had previously detained.[11]

Within twenty-four hours after the Stephenson-Fleming fight Mink Slide lay paralyzed and partially destroyed, and one hundred persons languished in jail. Officials subsequently released most of the prisoners either for lack of evidence or because they posted bond, but the careless manner in which lawmen arrested them and destroyed their property proved irresponsible. The state government's reaction to the black resistance of February 25 appeared to be out of proportion to the alleged crime committed. The heavy-handed tactics of the law can be better understood in connection with the rumors that commanded Columbia's attention. Fears of a black insurrection shocked local whites, and the sanctity of Columbia's color line, already threatened by black wartime gains, appeared to hang in the balance as whites worried over the effect that returning black veterans might have. For blacks the situation involving James Stephenson and the invasion of Mink Slide proved too much to bear, and rumors of a white assault reinforced their belief that wartime sacrifices had not changed their status. That whites would attempt to lynch a black veteran and, having failed, employ the state's power to wreak vengeance upon them left many black Columbians incredulous. Since neither side knew the real situation, the violence that erupted on February 25 and 26 emerged from mutual suspicion and ignorance.[12]

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[11] Ruffin to Caudle, March 11, 1946, Justice Department Records; Clegg to Hoover, April 30, 1946, FBI Records.

[12] Typescript of notes taken at Columbia defense meeting, March 4, 1946, in "Tennessee, Columbia Riot," LF, NAACP Papers; Beeler, "Race Riot in Columbia," 129.

Ironically, the only fatalities connected with the Columbia episode occurred on February 28. Police had been arresting and questioning area blacks, and on that afternoon officers brought three suspects into the sheriff's office for interrogation. William Gordon, James Johnson, and Napoleon Stewart sat in the office while deputies informed them that after questioning they could leave if they made $250 bond. During a lull in the questioning Gordon and Johnson reached for a group of confiscated rifles stacked in a corner. Gordon managed to load one of these, apparently with ammunition contained in a coat pocket, and shot one of the deputies in the arm. The shot attracted several nearby officers, and they quickly shot both Gordon and Johnson. Stewart remained in his seat during the episode, but officers beat him up. Since Columbia possessed no jim crow hospital facilities, officers loaded the victims into a car and started the forty-mile trip to Nashville. The blacks died in transit.[13]

Because of this incident and the lack of security it implied, Governor McCord sent an additional 250 guardsmen to Columbia, bringing the total to about 700. These troops remained in town until March 3, but sixty-five state troopers stayed longer. Within a few days officials dropped charges against all but thirty-five of the prisoners and released all of them on bond.[14]

Columbia remained in a state of consternation as public interest heightened. Mayor Denham issued an ameliorative statement that implored Columbians to "refrain from congregating and be calm and sane and return

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[13]Ruffin to Caudle, March 11, 1946, Justice Department Records; Beeler, "Race Riot in Columbia," 33-35.

[14]Clegg to Hoover, April 30, 1946, FBI Records; Beeler, "Race Riot in Columbia," 33-35.

to normal relations with each other." Few others, however, cared whether the city returned to normal, because they appeared more interested in assigning blame or in attaching political significance to the episode. The editor of the Columbia Daily Herald expressed one end of the editorial spectrum when he asserted that "the Negro has not a chance of gaining supremacy over a sovereign people, and the sooner the better element of the Negro race realize this the better off the race will be." On the other end the communist Daily Worker warned that "a mass Scottsboro frameup is in the making here in the cradle of the Ku Klux Klan," the result of "a violent armed invasion" on Mink Slide by "white militiamen, vigilantes and hoodlums." Taking cognizance of such stories, the Christian Century told its readers that "it is hard to believe that they deal with the same tragedy," and that "almost everything about the riot points toward future trouble on a larger scale." The NAACP's organ Crisis warned that the Columbia episode appeared to confirm the "predictions of many persons that mob violence would be used after the war to force the Negro back into his 'place.'"[15]

Following the violence, a series of investigations and court cases lasted through mid-1947. Beginning on February 26, state, federal, and NAACP inquiries got underway, eventually leading to a series of lengthy court battles. The state probe proved the briefest and most superficial. On the 27th Governor McCord sent his assistant attorney general, Ernest F. Smith, to Columbia. Smith remained there only a few days and in his

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[15]Columbia Daily Herald, February 26, 1946; New York Daily Worker, February 28, 1946; "Tennessee Race Riot a Danger Sign," Christian Century, March 13, 1946, p. 325; "Editorials: Terror in Tennessee," Crisis, 53 (April 1946), 105.

report included a mixture of general factual information and personal opinion that apparently satisfied officials in Nashville. From the report it appeared that Smith made a pest of himself as he attended all official meetings and counted beer bottles in Mink Slide. He obviously held a low opinion of most blacks he encountered, and his report contained statements and conclusions supporting that view. Seeing a conspiracy, he asserted that "every character of gun" was confiscated from the black district, and that "I am convinced that there had been a plan devised by one or more negroes in Columbia to create ill-feeling toward the white population." The tone of the entire report was blatantly prejudicial, but unfortunately Governor McCord and the other state officials relied on it as the official investigative document. In his conclusion Smith praised the local law enforcement officials and in particular Sheriff Underwood for doing "everything at his command to quiet the disturbance." He similarly lauded the state guard for its actions. Finally, Smith asserted that the riot would never have occurred had it not been "for the deliberate action of Sol, Julius and Charles Blair and James Morton." In effect, the official state report blamed blacks for a disturbance that began with white reaction to a fistfight and the shooting of four policemen, and culminated in an invasion of the black community and the destruction of a large part of it.[16]

Meanwhile the Justice Department contacted Governor McCord to obtain his permission for an FBI probe of the Columbia incident. McCord agreed, and on March 1 the FBI directed special agent D. S. Hostetter

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[16]Smith, "Report on Investigation," McCord Papers.

to give priority to the Columbia inquiry and not to hesitate in asking for extra help. Apparently pressure from the White House contributed to the Justice Department's keen interest in the case, especially after an extraordinary amount of public reaction reached President Harry S. Truman. The bureau conducted a thorough inquiry lasting about a week, and subsequent follow-up probes resulted as court cases proceeded. Of the three major outbreaks in the South during the war years, Mobile, Beaumont, and Columbia, the Tennessee riot proved to be the only one the FBI fully investigated.[17]

The federal government's involvement in the case meant that federal statutes could have been violated. Thus the FBI agents in Columbia searched for evidence of any infringement upon the civil rights of the Mink Slide inhabitants as defined in Sections 51 and 52, Title 18, of the United States Code. Section 52 dealt with "depriving citizens of civil rights under color of State laws," which in this case meant that any of the defendants could have charged such a violation against the local peace officers, state troopers, or state guardsmen. In addition, the FBI wanted to discover the truth of the rumored conspiracy to lynch James Stephenson on February 25. Finally, the FBI learned that a series of telephone calls to and from Chicago had occurred at the residence of a black Columbian during the riot, leading some agents to suspect either an organized conspiracy to provoke racial discord or subversive activity. Hostetter and other agents began the probe on March 1 and concluded it on March 8,

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[17]Memorandum, J. C. Strickland to D. M. Ladd, April 2, 1946, FBI Records; Beeler, "Race Riot in Columbia," 68-70.

interviewing almost four hundred people in the process.[18]

Although a number of black people remained in the Maury County jail for several days following the mass arrests without having any charges placed against them, only three persons charged that their civil rights had been violated in this connection. Predictably, those three were Julius Blair, Sol Blair, and James Morton. They complained that local officials held them in jail an unreasonable length of time without giving them the opportunity to make bond and, more important, that their Mink Slide businesses had suffered unnecessary damage during the state intrusion on February 26. Although others could have made the same complaints, intimidation or the desire not to cause further difficulties compelled them to remain silent. The Blairs and Morton, however, displayed remarkable fortitude in their actions which cast them as heroes among blacks and as troublemakers among whites. When the FBI probe ended on March 8, the agents concluded that no basis existed for any violation of federal laws, although the bureau continued to make inquiries, and, after a federal grand jury convened, it engaged in yet another flurry of activity.[19]

As the state and federal investigations continued, the NAACP entered the fray. The association's involvement in the case proved a godsend for the black defendants but did nothing to quell the acrimony among whites. On the morning of February 26 a frantic telephone call awakened Walter White in New York, telling him of the riot. He immediately

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[18]Horace Frierson to Caudle, March 1, 1946, Justice Department Records; Memorandum, Caudle to Hoover, March 1, 1946; Clegg to Hoover, April 30, 1946; Memorandum, D. M. Ladd to E. A. Tamm, March 2, 1946, FBI Records.

[19]Clegg to Hoover, April 30, 1946; Caudle to Hoover, March 8, 1946, FBI Records.

contacted NAACP officials in Chattanooga. By that afternoon a young white lawyer and Navy veteran, Maurice Weaver, was at the scene as the national office scrambled into action. While Weaver attempted to talk with some of the prisoners, White telegraphed Governor McCord asking for an appointment. When he arrived in Nashville a local attorney, West Indian-born Z. Alexander Looby, and the Reverend William J. Faulkner of Fisk University accompanied him to the governor's office where a decidedly hostile conversation ensued. White's irritating manner and McCord's provincial attitudes resulted in heightened suspicion on both sides. White set up his base of operations in Nashville, and NAACP special counsel Thurgood Marshall joined him. They proceeded to construct a defense for more than thirty black Columbians charged with assault to commit murder.[20]

On March 4, White, Looby, Weaver, James Dombrowski of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare (SCHW), and others met with the Blairs and James Morton. The three defendants retold the story of the mob action stemming from the Fleming-Stephenson fight, the Mink Slide incursion of the next day, and their experiences before and after being arrested. A sizeable publicity campaign appeared necessary, both to gain financial support and to keep the attention of federal authorities. After weighing various alternatives, they decided to form a loose coalition for the defense of the blacks and simultaneously to attract groups and prominent individuals to their cause. On March 11 the NAACP formally announced that it would defend the Columbia blacks, and three days later

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[20]White, A Man Called White, 309-13; Beeler, "Race Riot in Columbia," 49-51; Interview, Maurice M. Weaver to James A. Burran, July 8, 1977, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

representatives of nineteen organizations formed the National Committee for Justice in Columbia, Tennessee (NCJC). Besides the NAACP and SCHW, other groups present included the Urban League, ACLU, CIO, National Lawyers Guild, and Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. The group agreed to allow the NAACP to take the initiative in future actions, which included asking Attorney General Tom Clark to investigate fully the operations of the state authorities in the February 26 Mink Slide invasion, seeking an appointment with President Truman, and raising funds.[21]

On March 19 White asked Eleanor Roosevelt and Channing H. Tobias to serve the NCJC as co-chairmen, and they accepted. Within a few weeks the list of participating organizations had grown to about sixty, but along the way the NCJC suddenly faced a problem that threatened its continuation. One of the member groups that joined the coalition during this period was the Communist Party. On the one hand the NAACP could hardly afford to refuse membership to the communists since both claimed to be defenders of the oppressed. But some important NCJC supporters, most notably Mrs. Roosevelt, balked at the addition of communists to the group. The situation in Columbia, already unpromising, could be lost altogether if the communists tied themselves to the defense effort.

The communists themselves solved the problem. The Daily Worker sent Harry Raymond to the scene to photograph the destruction while Robert Minor, secretary of the legislative committee of the party and long-time civil liberties advocate, accompanied him. They generated so

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[21]Typescript of notes taken at Columbia defense meeting, March 4, 1946; Press release, March 11, 1946, in "Press Releases--Columbia, Tenn. Riot"; "Minutes of Meeting re: Columbia Riot," undated, in "Minutes, Columbia, Tennessee Meetings," GOF, NAACP Papers.

much hostility among the local residents, law officials, and FBI, that the NCJC disassociated itself from them. Minor committed the main error when he called a meeting among local blacks to form the Maury County Voters League, an act that Walter White blasted as "the damndest piece of ill-advised action imaginable." Press reaction proved similarly hostile, with the Nashville Banner charging that "Commies" and "celebrities of pink hue" lay behind "this mess that threatens to disrupt an otherwise happy and contented people."[22]

Meanwhile the NCJC and other groups worked to raise money and focus attention on the Columbia defense. These activities included a benefit dance at New York's Savoy Ballroom on May 3, at least one radio broadcast and perhaps most important, a series of publicity tours by the defendants. The idea for these tours came from the NAACP, and from mid-April through mid-May the NCJC and the association's Legal Defense and Educational Fund branch took most of the defendants in five separate groups to forty-eight cities, most in the North and Midwest. These tours raised $7,000 and prompted thousands of protest letters. Although most of the NAACP's strength lay in areas outside the South, this drive showed its renewed vitality just as it provided the association with valuable experience it would employ during the 1950s.[23]

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[22]Telegrams, White to Eleanor Roosevelt, White to Channing H. Tobias, March 19, 1946; White to Roosevelt, March 25, 1946, in "Co-Chairmen--E. Roosevelt-C. Tobias (Columbia)"; White to John Hammond, April 22, 1946, in "Committee, Columbia Tenn. Correspondence--Harold Oram," GOF, NAACP Papers; Nashville Banner, April 16, 1946.

[23]"Along the NAACP Battlefront," Crisis, 53 (May 1946), 151; Press release, May 3, 1946, in "Press Releases--Columbia Tenn. Riot"; "Tour Schedule for Columbia Defendants," undated; Memorandum, Madison S. Jones to White, May 13, 1946, in "Columbia Tenn.--Speakers and Meetings," GOF, NAACP Papers.

With the conclusion of the FBI, state, and NAACP investigations, there followed a tangle of legal battles, simultaneous hearings on different jurisdictional levels, pleas for changes of venue, arguments over the composition of the juries, and other squabbles that eventually found their way to the Tennessee Supreme Court. In mid-March a Maury County grand jury handed down indictments against thirty-one Columbia blacks. Twenty-eight were indicted for attempted murder or inciting others to murder, while the jury indicted the other three on lesser charges. In addition, the jury indicted four whites, including the two drunks arrested on February 25. At this time federal intervention seemed remote, especially considering the FBI findings. Yet public pressure and keen White House interest prompted Attorney General Clark to convene a federal grand jury in Nashville, with Judge Elmer D. Davies presiding. At issue was the possible violation of the defendants' civil rights, including the rumored attempted lynching of James Stephenson, the failure of law officers to obtain search warrants, the unnecessary damage done to Mink Slide businesses, the unreasonably lengthy detention of the defendants, and the deaths of William Gordon and James Johnson.[24]

The federal grand jury met in Nashville on April 8, and immediately Judge Davies began complaining about civil rights groups and their publications regarding the Columbia riot. Davies produced a copy of the SCHW's publicity pamphlet, "The Truth About Columbia," and suggested that the grand jury subpoena the SCHW's officials. If the statements proved

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[24]"Along the NAACP Battlefront," Crisis, 53 (August 1946), 251; Beeler, "Race Riot in Columbia," 68-70; Strickland to Ladd, April 2, 1946, FBI Records.

true, he observed, "you should act accordingly and return indictments against the persons responsible for those acts." If the statements proved false, however, the "circulators of this pamphlet should be exposed for deliberately agitating matters of this kind to cause difficulties between races which are trying to live together in peace and harmony." In the midst of this and other complaints the grand jury sifted through the evidence but appeared to be getting little done. Finally, on April 29, the court determined that it could proceed no further until the FBI investigation was made available. It adjourned until late May as the FBI reviewed its files and released the interviews.[25]

The bureau not only reviewed its files but followed up on leads and controversial points developed during the initial inquiry. It managed to identify several whites, photographed by newspaper and magazine correspondents, who appeared to be in the process of ransacking Mink Slide businesses but took no action against them and did not recommend local prosecution. The bureau also investigated the widespread belief that Columbia blacks had conspired to cause trouble by arming themselves and holding secret meetings prior to February 25 but could not substantiate such beliefs. Finally, the FBI followed its lead involving mysterious telephone calls to and from Chicago in the immediate aftermath of the violence, a fact that had earlier appeared to corroborate the conspiracy theory. In May, agents discovered that the calls in question came from James Booker, a black man from Chicago, whose purpose lay in

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[25]"The Social Front: Violence," Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations, 3 (April 1946), 266; Clegg to Hoover, April 30, 1946, FBI Records.

confirming the safety of his mother who resided in Columbia. In an overall review to J. Edgar Hoover, Justice Department official H. H. Clegg chided the director for failure to clear up these problems earlier and implied that the bureau's handling of the Columbia investigation had been sloppy.[26]

After the grand jury received the FBI's transcripts of nearly four hundred interviews and other material, it reconvened. On June 14 it issued its report which concluded that local and state authorities had violated no federal laws during or after the riot. The jury noted that "an efficient and adequate guard was not maintained throughout the 'Mink Slide' area" after the violence but contended that this did not constitute a violation of federal statutes. The jury recognized the destruction of portions of the area but complained that available evidence made it "wholly impossible to determine the identity of such person or persons or to elicit facts upon which to predicate an indictment in this respect." The actions of the state authorities on February 26 in moving through Mink Slide and subsequent imprisonment procedures appeared perfectly legal to the grand jury, so the charges by Julius Blair, Sol Blair, and James Morton that their civil rights had been violated collapsed. Finally, the jury found no evidence to support a rumored lynching attempt on February 25, mainly because no evidence revealed the purchase of a rope on that day. The deaths of Gordon and Johnson on the 28th were ruled justifiable

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[26]FBI Report on Columbia Riot, Memphis Tennessee, May 10, 1946; FBI Report on Columbia Riot, Memphis, Tennessee, May 17, 1946; FBI Report on Columbia Riot, Chicago, Illinois, May 17, 1946; Clegg to Hoover, April 30, 1946, FBI Records.

homicide. In the remainder of its report the federal grand jury expressed alarm at various newspaper reports and pamphlets which had as their purpose "the malicious intent and desire to incite racial discord and intolerance and to cause further racial strife." In a patriotic conclusion the jury's report admonished "the good citizens of both races [to] be on their guard against insidious and false propaganda."[27]

Although the grand jury answered the question of federal intervention in the case, the fates of the black defendants remained undecided. On May 28, as the federal grand jury reconvened in Nashville, a Maury County circuit court convened to try those people indicted by the local grand jury. Twenty-six, including Julius and Sol Blair and James Morton, faced two counts of attempting to commit murder in the first degree and accessory before the fact. Additional charges of accessory after the fact and carrying a shotgun faced Morton, and a charge of carrying a pistol added to Sol Blair's problems. James and Gladys Stephenson faced other indictments.[28]

Without delay defense attorney Maurice Weaver asked that the indictments be quashed because the Maury County grand jury systematically excluded blacks. Prosecuting attorney Paul F. Bumpus denied such allegations and threatened to contest every move the defense made, but Judge Joe M. Ingram agreed to begin hearings on the subject. In two weeks Weaver called 223 blacks, most of whom proved qualified to sit on grand

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[27]"Report of Grand Jury in the Matter of the Racial Disturbance at Columbia, Tennessee, June 14, 1946," FBI Records.

[28]Typescript of indictments in Columbia trial, undated, in "Tennessee, Columbia Riot," LF, NAACP Papers; "Along the NAACP Battlefront," Crisis, 53 (July 1946), 212.

juries, but the fact remained that no blacks had acted in such a capacity in the county for fifty years. On June 12 Bumpus began a refutation of the defense's charges, and six days later Judge Ingram ruled that he could see no discrimination in the system of jury selection. Anticipating this decision, Weaver and Thurgood Marshall asked for a change of venue. They hoped that the proceedings could be moved to Davidson County, where the defendants stood more likely to receive a fair trial. Arguments on the change of venue took place from July 2 through 5, when Ingram granted the change for twenty-six of the defendants. Instead of moving the trial to Nashville, however, he chose Lawrenceburg, thirty-four miles away.[29]

While Weaver, Looby, and the other defense lawyers worried over their next move, Thurgood Marshall developed pneumonia and had to bow out of the case. He did not return until October. Meanwhile the citizens of Lawrenceburg exhibited as negative an attitude toward the change of venue as the defense counselors. Mayor R. O. Downey complained, "we feel that we have been imposed upon and unjustly treated in this matter," and "we do not feel that we should bear the stigma of something that happened somewhere else and in which we have no part." Similarly, the editor of the local Democrat-Union grumbled that "Lawrenceburg people do not feel an obligation to wash the dirty linen of Columbia . . . or any other city."[30]

Despite these and other protests, preliminary hearings began on August 3. Looby and Weaver filed a second request for a change of venue,

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[29]Beeler, "Race Riot in Columbia," 80-90; Weaver to Burran, July 8, 1977.

[30]Unidentified memorandum describing Marshall's illness in "Tennessee, Columbia Riot," LF, NAACP Papers; Lawrenceburg Democrat-Union, July 12, 1946.

producing affidavits from area blacks to support their contention that Lawrenceburg represented no improvement over Columbia. Ingram denied the request. The defense then asked for postponement of the proceedings because of Marshall's illness, but the judge would not be delayed. The trial began on August 13. Immediately frustrations over jury selection emerged. Weaver planned to use all two hundred of his peremptory challenges to insure a palatable panel, but Ingram foiled him. After three weeks of haggling over the prospective jurors, the judge handed down the unusual ruling that he, and not the lawyers, would question the veniremen. For the next two weeks Ingram admitted several persons to the jury who proved clearly undesirable to the defense, including one man who said he believed in separate types of justice for whites and blacks. Along the way one of the prospective jurors produced a medical certificate confirming that he suffered from a form of psychoneurosis, whereupon Ingram leaned over and asked him, "where does it hurt? What ails you?" Finally, from over four hundred veniremen, the jury was completed. It consisted of six farmers, two carpenters, a janitor, a chemical plant worker, a merchant, and a saw mill operator. All were white. One of the jurors, a state guardsman, had been on duty in Columbia during the February violence.[31]

As the trial got underway the defense attempted to prove that Lynn Bomar and his state troopers, the first state officials at Mink Slide, illegally moved into businesses and homes, ransacked them, recklessly shot up the area, arrested blacks without warrants, and beat some of them while

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[31]"Along the NAACP Battlefront," Crisis, 53 (September 1946), 277; ibid. (October 1946), 309; Columbia Daily Herald, August 3, 1946; Lawrenceburg Democrat-Union, September 20, 1946; "Mink Slide: The Aftermath," Time, October 14, 1946, p. 29; Weaver to Burran, July 8, 1977.

holding others incommunicado. Weaver's questioning of Bomar on September 26 bore out the allegations. The highway patrol chief admitted searching and arresting without warrants, kicking down doors, and beating up prisoners but maintained that such tactics were necessary in a state of emergency. He admitted that his men did not have full police power and that their only specific duties were issuing traffic citations and confiscating illegal liquor. "Sometimes we assume some powers we really don't have," he explained. Later, Weaver asked Bomar if he had "any feeling at all against any of these defendants." He replied, "I don't have any feeling. I have some very good friends among the colored people and I have got more respect for any colored men here than I have you."[32]

In early October the prosecution and defense delivered their final orations. Bumpus ignored the issues and asserted instead that "I will continue to defend my people against the Fascist tendencies created by dirty rats who are misrepresenting actual conditions in Tennessee." He scolded the "agitators" who "poured out a flood of sewerage that would nauseate a skunk." L. A. Ransom of the defense then reminded the jury that the Columbia violence had been started by a white lynch mob and that the defendants had simply tried to protect themselves. At 5:00 p.m. on October 4 the verdict came in: the jury found all but two of the defendants not guilty. Robert Gentry and John McKivens were convicted of attempted murder.[33]

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[32]Alva W. Taylor, "Sift Blame for Tennesse Riot," Christian Century, April 24, 1946, pp. 531-32; Tennessee v. Sol Blair et al., September 26, 1946, in "Tennessee, Columbia Riot," LF, NAACP Papers.

[33]Columbia Daily Herald, October 3, 4, 5, 1946; November 11, 21, 1946; Pittsburgh Courier, October 12, 1946.

The defense was elated; Maurice Weaver melodramatically shouted, "this makes a man proud to be an American." The prosecution, visibly deflated, sat stunned as the courtroom cleared, for the general consensus as the trial came to a close clearly favored the prosecution.[34] That a jury composed of rural southern whites freed all but two of the defendants in a trial emanating from a well-publicized threat to the racial system proved remarkable. Civil rights groups frankly expected another kangaroo court, similar to the Scottsboro trials, and in some ways the two cases reflected similarities. The object of the defense lay in taking the case to the Supreme Court, but the jury's decision precluded that possibility, especially after the state reversed itself and dropped the charges against Gentry and McKivens.

The remaining legal battles proved anticlimactic. The four whites arrested in connection with the riot, along with James and Gladys Stephenson, went free when the state dropped the charges against them. Two other blacks, Lloyd Kennedy and William Pillow, were tried in Columbia during November on charges of attempting to kill Ray Austin, a state trooper. The court found Pillow innocent but convicted Kennedy. The NAACP appealed Kennedy's conviction to the state supreme court, which upheld the lower court in a June 1947 decision. Kennedy went to prison on a one-to-five-year sentence, and with that the long struggle to free the Columbia defendants ended.[35]

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[34]Transcript of telephone conversation, White to Ollie Harrington, October 5, 1946, in "Dept. of Justice--FBI/Columbia, Tenn.," GOF, NAACP Papers.

[35]Columbia Daily Herald, November 19, 1946; December 7, 1946; February 1, 11, 1947; June 5, 1947; Kennedy v. Tennessee, 210 S. W. 2d 132 (1947).

The most arresting fact about the Columbia riot was that a relatively small outbreak provoked such widespread publicity, inquiries, and legal action. The town and its inhabitants mirrored others across the South in the wartime population loss, the stringent system of race relations underneath a deceptive picture of harmony, the latent interracial suspicions, and white fears of the impact of returning black veterans on southern society. In the face of political and economic changes many whites attempted to preserve familiar institutions, and any action by blacks that appeared to threaten the color line invited swift retribution. At the same time, however, blacks tired of the continuing discrimination. They saw white reactions to their improvements as part of an overall attempt to deny gains they deserved. In Columbia, a threatened lynching as the result of an interracial brawl confirmed their suspicions, while to whites the fight served as proof that black veterans intended to challenge racial traditions.

That both groups interpreted the riot differently reflected the lack of interracial communication that lay at the heart of the violence and explained the overwhelming response by the state of Tennessee. To whites, the riot started when Mink Slide residents shot four policemen on the night of February 25. To blacks, this incident was a regrettable but unavoidable outgrowth of white preparations to lynch James Stephenson and perhaps even his mother. For the blacks, the riot started on the morning of February 26 when well over one hundred lawmen invaded Mink Slide, wounded several residents, and destroyed property. To the whites, including the decision makers in Nashville, the Mink Slide intrusion proved absolutely necessary to subdue an uprising, and the fact that

several officers received injuries represented not black self-defense but a blatant disregard of established authority.

The FBI investigated the Columbia incident for evidence of violation of civil liberties and subversive activity but found neither. Those blacks who faced trial were bitter, for they contended that they committed no crime in defending themselves against a state-supported extralegal invasion. Whites, on the other hand, saw the trials as justifiable, coming from violent and unwarranted action which threatened their concept of postwar stability. From this incident such groups as the NAACP gained valuable experience that it would use in its school desegregation struggles of the next eight years.

In the end only Lloyd Kennedy went to prison. The acquittal of the remaining defendants was generally hailed as nothing short of miraculous, and sages predicted a new era in southern justice. Yet Kennedy's fate still proved more the rule and the acquittals more the exception for this period. The outcome of the trials must be viewed on two levels--the national and the local. From the national perspective the NAACP won an incredible victory. But from the local viewpoint the victory meant little. As soon as the state and federal agencies left Columbia, little change could be seen, save perhaps increased mutual suspicion. Southern blacks, especially those who lived in places like Columbia, could not depend on the NAACP or the SCHW to rescue them. They had to live within the traditions established by the majority, and effective changes would come only from the grassroots level.

CHAPTER IX

THE COLOR LINE TRIUMPHANT

The February 1946 Columbia riot was the largest incident of racial violence in the immediate postwar era. The number of clashes, however, rose dramatically in the period following, peaking in the summer months of 1946. During the course of these outbreaks, the white South's opposition to postwar gains for blacks crystallized. The cycle of southern race relations seemed complete, for as the international crisis passed, many of the modest strides southern blacks had taken during the war passed with it. The most significant of these gains had occurred in the economic and political spheres. For example, the black proportion of the nationwide work force rose during the conflict from about 3 percent to over 8 percent, with southern blacks benefitting to some degree, while the demise of the white primary found an increasing number of black southerners registering to vote. The violence and conservatism that many whites exhibited in reaction forced them into the same separate and unequal coexistence that existed before the war. Although this did not occur with blacks standing idly by, continual attempts to preserve their gains invariably met with intimidation and violence. Blacks clutched at the elusive strands of advancement, but whites always kept the goals out of reach. Their efforts stymied, blacks drew back in a state of bitterness and alienation.[1]

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[1]Wynn, Afro-American and Second World War, 55.

Thus, by the end of 1946 southern blacks were in much the same position as they had been in 1940 and earlier--firmly locked behind the color line. They did sense a negative difference though. Before the war economic destitution seemed to ignore the color line, but with reconversion prosperity appeared to erase the familiarity that had once emerged from adversity. Whites meant for prosperity to serve them first, especially with the relatively high rate of unemployment that produced a scramble for jobs. Such economic competition proved directly responsible for the Athens, Alabama, riot of August. Violence built the wall separating the races even higher than before, and the doors leading to the American mainstream slammed shut. This left blacks with two alternatives: to leave the South altogether or to refine further their generations-old subsociety. Some fled, but most opted, mainly out of necessity, to remain. Their wartime gains, then, proved in many ways ephemeral.

In addition to the general tension evident in the postwar South, other factors perpetuated violence. The resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan and likeminded groups epitomized a reactionary fringe element that historically has emerged in periods of change and instability. Once the unity and feverish pace of the war effort subsided, these groups tried to recreate some imagined golden age of morality and white supremacy. In October 1945, Jesse B. Stoner, who served as "Kleagle" of the "Realm of Tennessee," predicted that the KKK would reach its zenith during the period when jobless veterans and laid-off workers returned to their homes looking for employment. "The conflict," Stoner reportedly said, "will come when Negroes, who have gotten jobs because of the war and the

FEPC, won't give up those jobs."[2]

The Klan revival lasted only a few years. By 1952 most state governments managed to suppress the organization, but revoking charters or infiltrating "klaverns" sometimes had little effect on diverting reactionary feelings. This resurgence, like that of the 1920s, involved "marginal" white businessmen and blue collar workers, among others. One scholar who studied the renewal of Klan activity during the late 1940s noted characteristics that transcended temporal factors. "The excessive vehemence with which some klansmen extol their white status and disassociate themselves from Negro status," he observed, "suggests that basically they may feel themselves as weak, deprived, and helpless as they imagine the Negro to be." They appeared to have been thwarted in achieving worthwhile goals and usually occupied precarious positions within the social system. As a result, they saw themselves as the victims of "inscrutable conspiracies and enemies." The postwar Klan, then, embraced those people whose powerlessness approached that of southern blacks.[3]

By early 1946 the Klan revival proved most evident in Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, and Florida, with some activity in South Carolina. The Appalachian hill country of East Tennessee, North Georgia, and North Alabama provided their strongest bailiwick. In March a score of burning crosses lit the night near Chattanooga and Knoxville, followed in April by six cross burnings in Birmingham and similar activity in Miami. On

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[2]Harold Preece, "The Klan Declares War," New Masses, October 16, 1945, pp. 3-4.

[3]James W. Vander Zanden, "The Klan Revival," American Journal of Sociology, 65 (March 1960), 456, 458, 460-62.

May 9 klansmen burned a giant cross atop their shrine, Stone Mountain, near Atlanta. About seven hundred members of the Invisible Empire and over one thousand spectators attended the ceremony, which featured the initiation of five hundred new members. One observer noticed that most of the parked cars bore license plates from Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, and South Carolina.[4]

During the 1930s, the Klan in Georgia obtained a charter that described it as a "fraternal organization for white gentiles only." Following the May 9 demonstration, an aroused Southern Regional Council, based in Atlanta, decided to investigate the Klan. Stetson Kennedy, one of the SRC's most energetic investigators who built a one-man campaign against the KKK, wrote Georgia Governor Ellis Arnall to ask if he might consider legal action against the Invisible Empire. Arnall already had the same thought in mind, and after consultation with Georgia's attorney general, the state made Kennedy an undercover agent. Kennedy did considerable snooping, and as a result on June 20 the state filed a suit against the Klan. It asked the group to show reason why the state should not revoke its charter, especially in light of recent terroristic acts against innocent citizens. The Klan representatives simply denied the allegations and then asked that the charges be dropped and that the state be required to pay the court costs.[5]

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[4]Guzman, Negro Year Book, 217-20; Pittsburgh Courier, March 30 1946; "The Social Front: Violence," Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations, 3 (April 1946), 267; "The Social Front: The Ku Klux Klan," ibid. (May 1946), 301.

[5]Report by Stetson Kennecy, undated; Transcript of information, Georgia v. Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, June 20, 1946, SRC Papers, Box 1.

Whether or not the Klan's charter remained valid in Georgia made little difference in its activities. The KKK, essentially a covert organization anyway, did not really need such formalities as a charter. Besides, other organizations spawned by postwar fears and insecurities could take the Klan's place if it collapsed. The Columbians of Atlanta proved typical. Headed by people who believed the doom of the "Aryan" race was imminent, it caused considerable commotion until late in the year when a Georgia jury convicted its leaders for "usurping police power." Such organizations as the Klan and Columbians played an effective role in provoking the postwar racial violence in the South.[6]

Politics also proved responsible, at least indirectly, for prolonging the resurgence of violence in mid-1946. In at least two southern states, Georgia and Mississippi, race-baiting found its way into the 1946 gubernatorial and congressional elections. By 1946 the liberalism of Ellis Arnall, combined with the postwar situation, led many Georgia voters to react against moderate politics, and blacks provided the first object of attention. Gubernatorial hopeful Eugene Talmadge exploited it. Concurrently with the race for the Democratic nomination came a court ruling based on Smith v. Allwright that allowed blacks to vote in the previously lily-white primary. This action doomed the Arnall forces and gave Talmadge a winning issue. Georgia's voter registration doubled, and fearing the black threat, many Talmadgites conducted wholesale purges of their registration books--blacks faced hostile officials who asked why

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[6]"The Social Front: The Columbians," Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations, 4 (November 1946), 102; "The Social Front: The Hate Outfits," ibid. (March 1947), 234.

they should not be barred from voting due to "illiteracy, criminal record, bad character," and the like.[7]

The symbolic rejuvenation of the Ku Klux Klan at Stone Mountain on May 9 added fuel to Talmadge's fire, the Negrophobic candidate and Invisible Empire complementing each other. In a June speech Talmadge clarified his views on race when he stated, "I was raised among niggers and I understand them. I want to see them treated fairly and I want to see them have justice in the courts. But I want to deal with the nigger in this way: he must come to my backdoor, take off his hat, and say, 'yes, sir.'" Racial tension heightened in the days before the primary, and violence thereafter seemed inevitable. Talmadge emerged victorious in the June 17 balloting.[8]

Meanwhile the senior senator from Mississippi, Theodore G. Bilbo, mounted a similar campaign. Blacks in his state, under the influence of returning veterans and local leaders, began a voter registration effort to permit their participation in the July primary. Alarmed, Bilbo urged his supporters to use whatever means necessary to keep blacks away from the polls and repeatedly condoned violence. In fact, Bilbo became so exercised over the thought of their casting ballots in the state that he dusted off one of his pet projects--sending all blacks back to Africa. By the time of the July 2 primary election, most blacks in Mississippi, through weeks of intimidation, stayed away from the polls. Bilbo eked

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[7]William Anderson, The Wild Man from Sugar Creek: The Political Career of Eugene Talmadge (Baton Rouge, 1975), 215-22; Smith v. Allwright, 321 U. S. 649 (1944); Report by Kennedy, undated, SRC Papers.

[8]Anderson, Wild Man, 229-33.

out a narrow victory over four opponents.[9]

The postwar tension and instability, the rise of the Klan and similar groups, and Negrophobic politics converged in the summer of 1946 to continue the violence that had escalated since late 1945. It marked both the climax and the end of the South's postwar racial violence. On July 17 a mob of four whites shot and killed Maceo Snites in Taylor County, Georgia. He had breached the bounds of racial etiquette by being the only black person to vote in the primary. A coroner's jury reported that his attackers shot him in self-defense.[10]

On the heels of the Snites lynching came another in Holmes County, Mississippi. On July 19 a white farmer, Jeff Dodd, filed a complaint against one of his black tenants, Leon McTatie, for allegedly stealing three saddles. Sheriff Walter Murtagh arrested McTatie the same day and placed him in the county jail in Lexington. On the 22nd, however, Dodd reappeared and withdrew his complaint. Placing McTatie in his car, Dodd and five other white men drove the black man to his farm and began beating him in an attempt to extract a confession. McTatie continually denied knowledge of the crime and tried to stall his assailants by mentioning the names of several other local blacks who might have been involved. The ploy failed, for the men continued to beat him until they killed him. McTatie's wife, hiding in a clump of bushes nearby, witnessed the entire

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[9]Pittsburgh Courier, July 13, 1946; U. S., Congress, Senate, Hearings before the Special Committee to Investigate Senatorial Campaign Expenditures, 1946, Pursuant to S. Res. 224, A Resolution to Appoint a Special Committee to Investigate Senatorial Campaign Contributions and Expenditures in the 1946 Election, Mississippi, 79th Cong., 2d sess., 342.

[10]"America's Roll of Dishonor," Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations, 4 (August-September 1946), 28; "Georgia: The Best People Won't Talk," Time, August 5, 1946, p. 25; Atlanta Constitution, July 26, 1946.

episode. After McTatie died Dodd and the others decided to get rid of the body, so they drove to Sunflower County, about sixty miles distant, and dumped the corpse in a creek. County officials discovered the body and, unable to identify it, buried it. The incident thus came close to being one of many undiscovered lynchings.[11]

The murderers, however, did not suspect McTatie's wife would tell the sheriff what she saw. When she did, Murtagh locked the six whites in jail pending an inquest. Meanwhile, the sheriff learned that an unidentified black man lay buried in Sunflower County, so he got a court order, exhumed the body, and took it back to Lexington. Confronted with the evidence, three of the whites confessed to the beating, though they denied killing him. Shortly thereafter McTatie's two young stepsons, along with a white man, confessed to stealing the three saddles from Dodd and told the sheriff that McTatie had no knowledge of the theft.[12]

Following a brief investigation by the FBI, officials charged five of the six whites with murder and awaited a grand jury hearing. The sixth man, an Army private, was not charged. In October a Holmes County grand jury indicted the five for manslaughter; apparently the jury considered a murder charge too severe in connection with the death of a black man. The county circuit court inexplicably ordered two of the defendants acquitted, and after a brief trial the jury deliberated

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[11]Memorandum, Fred G. Folsom to Turner L. Smith, July 30, 1946, Justice Department Records; Atlanta Constitution, July 31, 1946. Contemporary sources spelled McTatie's name several eays, such as McAtte and McAtee. Most spelled it McTatie.

[12]Folsom to Smith, July 30, 1946, Justice Department Records; Jackson Clarion Ledger, August 1, 1946; "Mississippi: Awaiting Action," Time, August 12, 1946, pp. 20-21.

only four minutes before acquitting the other three men.[13]

Only three days after Leon McTatie's death the most heinous lynching of the entire war era took place and the first multiple lynching in Georgia since 1918. It represented the most shocking result of violence brought about by postwar tension, reactionary activities, and racist politics. On July 14, Roger Malcolm, a black farmhand who lived near Monroe (forty miles east of Atlanta), got into a fight with Barney Hester, Malcolm's former employer. The black man charged that Hester kept his wife as a mistress. Hester received a severe knife wound, and his brother-in-law, Deputy Sheriff Louis Howard, immediately arrested his assailant. Before Howard could deposit the black farmer in jail, however, ten white men tried to lynch him. A white woman intervened and persuaded the assailants to let him go. Malcolm remained in jail from July 14 until July 25, when his wife arranged to free him on bond.[14]

Malcolm's sister and her husband, May and George Dorsey, worked on Loy Harrison's farm in neighboring Oconee County. Dorsey was a recently discharged veteran. They cooperated with Malcolm's wife, and on July 25 persuaded Harrison to help them post bond for the prisoner. The three blacks and Harrison drove to Monroe and Harrison posted $600 bond. They remained in town for a couple of hours and did not leave on the return trip until about 5:30 p.m. Harrison, a 275-pound ex-convict, did not

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[13]Folsom to Smith, July 30, 1946, Justice Department Records; Jackson Clarion Ledger, August 1, 1946; Pittsburgh Courier, August 10, 1946; October 19, 1946; "The Social Front: Lynching," Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations, 4 (November 1946), 105.

[14]Pittsburgh Courier, August 3, 31, 1946; Atlanta Daily World, July 27, 1946; Thomas W. Johnson to Walter White, July 28, 1946, in "Walton County Ga. Lynching," GOF, NAACP Papers.

return on the main highway but instead took a back road. When the car reached a bridge spanning Apalachee Creek, which divided Walton and Oconee counties, it suddenly stopped. On the other side of the bridge stood twenty to thirty armed white men who leveled their guns at the auto while one pointed at Malcolm saying, "we want that nigger." He then gestured at Dorsey and said, "we want you, too." Harrison offered no resistance, but as the mob led the two men away, Malcolm's wife recognized one of the whites and implored him not to kill Dorsey and her husband. This cost both women their lives. The leader of the throng, a large, well-dressed man in his sixties, instructed four of the whites to bring the women along. At the same time another white asked Harrison if he recognized anyone; he naturally replied "no." The band of whites marched the four blacks a short distance, lined them up, and executed them. One of the lynchers then told Harrison to leave. Two hours later he called the Walton County sheriff and reported the crime.[15]

The news of this multiple lynching sent shock waves across the nation. As soon as Governor Arnall heard of the incident, he issued a statement proclaiming that "the decent people of Georgia are humiliated about the mass murder," and he put up a $10,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the lynchers. He also sent William E. Spence, chief of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI), to Walton County. President Truman called on Attorney General Tom Clark to undertake an exhaustive investigation to determine whether a federal

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[15]Pittsburgh Courier, August 3, 1946; Atlanta Constitution, July 27, 28, 1946; Atlanta Daily World, July 27, 1946; "Georgia: The Best People Won't Talk," Time, August 5, 1946, p. 25; "Along the NAACP Battlefront," Crisis, 53 (September 1946), 277; New York Times, July 27, 1946, pp. 1, 32.

case could be developed and called for renewed consideration of an anti-lynching bill. Six FBI agents arrived on the scene and worked closely with the GBI. One of the federal agents maintained constant surveillance over Loy Harrison, the only known eyewitness.

Meanwhile, an outraged NAACP contacted a white Macon lawyer, Thomas W. Johnson, and employed him as an investigator. In his first report to the New York office on July 28, Johnson confirmed Harrison's bootlegging activities, observed that the lynching appeared to have been planned in advance, and suggested that Eugene Talmadge's recent campaign was indirectly responsible for the violence. The NAACP forwarded the reports to Attorney General Clark as an indication of the association's interest in solving the case. The NAACP also matched Arnall's $10,000 reward, and other groups added to the sum.[16]

Other groups and individuals expressed similar concern and outrage over the incident, but Talmadge, vacationing in Wyoming after his arduous primary campaign, dismissed the matter casually. "Things like that are to be regretted," he remarked, adding that "nothing can be gained by giving equal rights to someone with an artificial civilization that has been forced upon him only 150 years ago."[17]

Loy Harrison's role in the murders raised several crucial questions. His proclaimed innocence in the lynching appeared extremely

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[16]Atlanta Daily World, July 28, 30, 1946; Atlanta Constitution, July 28, 29, 31, 1946; Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Harry S. Truman, 1946 (Washington, 1962), 368; Interoffice memorandum by White, July 25, 1946; Johnson to White, July 28, 1946, in "Walton County Ga. Lynching," GOF, NAACP Papers.

[17]Pittsburgh Courier, August 3, 1946.

questionable. As a lifelong resident of the area and a well-known bootlegger, Harrison certainly knew many area residents. When questioned, he described the leader of the mob as tall, dignified, in his sixties, wearing a brown suit and wide brimmed straw hat, and having "a good Florida tan." Yet Harrison insisted that he could not identify him or any other member of the mob, all of whom were unmasked. He admitted that Malcolm's wife had recognized one of the lynchers as they marched into the woods and yelled his name, but protested that he had not heard the name clearly, so he could not remember it. Harrison also offered no explanation for driving home from Monroe on a back road instead of taking the Atlanta-Athens highway as he had on the initial leg of the trip.

Investigators discovered that on July 4 Harrison had beaten his tenant, George Dorsey, and ordered him off the farm, possibly as a way of gaining possession of his crop. Officials found no record of the $600 bond supposedly posted by Harrison on July 25, but they did learn that the deputy sheriff who released Malcolm to Harrison's custody was a relative of Barney Hester, the man Malcolm had stabbed.[18]

A virtual conspiracy of silence by blacks and whites thwarted attempts by investigators to discover substantive facts. By July 30 the GBI knew the identity of at least five of the mob members and that Loy Harrison was unquestionably a co-conspirator, but the authorities possessed no evidence against them that would stand up in court. The six FBI and five GBI men thus proved unable to surmount the hostility of

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[18] Ibid.; "The Social Front: Lynching," Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations, 4 (August-September 1946), 4.

local authorities and the unwillingness of many of the area's inhabitants to talk. In addition, local lawmen and townspeople had trampled the scene of the crime, picking up the physical evidence in the process. As a result, investigators found nothing at the scene to help them--not even a bullet or shell case. Desperate for a lead in the case, the GBI considered bringing in either lie detector equipment or sodium pentothal (truth serum). It discarded this plan, however, and relied on more conventional techniques in unraveling the mystery.[19]

Meanwhile public interest in the case continued to mount. The reward money, which stood at $20,000 following the NAACP's contribution, soon rose to $32,000, and ultimately reached $64,000. Contributions came from such organizations as the Civil Rights Congress, the Southern Regional Council, and the American Civil Liberties Union. During the weeks following the incident, Atlanta, Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia held protest parades, rallies, and official days of mourning. Max Yergan, head of the National Negro Congress, led a protest march of one thousand people down Constitution Avenue to the White House. Thousands of letters poured in from groups and individuals.[20]

All the demonstrations, protests, and letters, however, could not expedite the investigation, though the NAACP did manage to discover four blacks who claimed to be eyewitnesses to the lynching. Willie Johnson told of how he sat unnoticed in a store as carloads of armed men headed for the

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[19]Press release, July 30, 1946, in "Walton County Ga. Lynching (Dept. of Justice--FBI)," GOF, NAACP Papers.

[20]Atlanta Daily World, July 30, 1946; August 2, 1946; "Programs of Action: Action Taken on Monroe, Georgia, Lynchings," Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations, 4 (August-September 1946), 29-30.

fateful bridge. He and a friend followed them on foot and hid in the bushes while the crime took place. The NAACP tracked down Johnson in Augusta. The other eyewitnesses, Johnny Burdette and his girlfriend, were parked on the back road near where the lynching took place and witnessed the murders. Fearing for their lives, they refused to testify publicly. The NAACP's discovery, therefore, added little to the development of the case. The major investigations led nowhere, and by mid-August rumors floated across the area that the GBI and FBI planned to give up on the inquiry.[21]

Finally, Attorney General Clark empaneled a federal grand jury to convene on December 2 in Athens. "I am sorry to say there is no field of law in which the Federal Government is expected to do so much with so little," he added pessimistically. "The right of life, liberty and property, the Supreme Court of the United States has repeatedly held, is not a federally secured right." After weeks of intense investigation and questioning 2,500 Walton County residents, the Department of Justice entered the grand jury hearing with little hope.[22]

The jury that convened included two blacks, but they undoubtedly felt pressure from their white co-jurors. Two of the other members, the NAACP complained, were relatives of Barney Hester. In all, the twenty-three man jury included "thirteen farmers, two merchants, two coal dealers,

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[21]Deposition of Willie Johnson, undated, in "Walton County Ga. Lynching"; White to Tom C. Clark, August 12, 1946, in "Walton County Ga. Lynching (Dept. of Justice--FBI)," GOF, NAACP Papers.

[22]"The Social Front: Lynching," Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations, 4 (November 1946), 104-5; Press release, December 2, 1946; White to Clark, December 1, 1946, in "Walton County Ga. Lynching," GOF, NAACP Papers.

a barber, a cotton gin operator, a banker, a laundry manager, a clerk and a 'retired farmer.'" U. S. District Attorney John Cowart presented the government's case, and Loy Harrison was the chief witness. The key issue, as always in an investigation of this nature, centered on whether the lynching involved the violation of federal civil rights statutes. The jury deliberated for seventeen days but on December 20 unanimously agreed that it could not identify "any person or persons participating in the murders or in any violation of the civil rights statutes of the United States."[23]

By the time of the grand jury's report, most of the parties involved concluded that no indictment appeared possible. When the results emerged, few people seemed surprised. The result pointed up once again, this time in the boldest relief possible given the nature of the lynching, the critical need for federal anti-lynching legislation. As the most shocking lynching of the war era, the case made martyrs of the four victims and provided much-needed publicity that later sparked renewed efforts in Congress for passage of an anti-lynching law. The crime itself revealed something about the nature of southern race relations and the lack of interracial understanding, just as it illustrated the continued deterioration of relations stemming from wartime changes. The inability of many whites to countenance even modest changes in the status of southern blacks indicated that they felt threatened by what postwar America might bring.[24]

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[23]Press release, December 2, 1946, NAACP Papers; Pittsburgh Courier, December 28, 1946.

[24]"The Social Front: Crime and Punishment," Events and Trends in Race Relations: A Monthly Summary [title changed as of January 1947], 4 (February 1947), 202.

If the Monroe incident stood as the largest and most gruesome of the wartime lynchings, the episode that followed proved the most bizarre. While southerners watched as the Monroe investigation proceeded, an attempted double lynching took place near Minden, Louisiana. Again, the sordid story included a black veteran, John C. Jones, a twenty-eight-year-old ex-GI. He returned home after his discharge on January 7, 1946, to Cotton Valley, a small town several miles north of Minden and just east of Shreveport, situated in the oil-rich lands of northern Louisiana. Once home Jones found the audacity, gained through his service in the Army, to ask embarrassing questions about his grandfather's fleecing at the hands of the Premier Oil Company. It seems that the seventy-six-year-old man, who could neither read nor write, owned land that had produced oil for years. The company took advantage of the situation by signing a lease for the oil at ridiculously low prices--thirty-nine cents a month for one well, $1.50 a month for another. Jones questioned that arrangement--a breach of local racial etiquette that provoked local whites. In addition, Jones' bravery as a corporal and Battle of the Bulge survivor represented a threat to racial harmony in Cotton Valley, and the black man soon earned the reputation of being "uppity" and a "smart nigger."[25]

On July 31 local police arrested Jones' younger cousin, Albert Harris, Jr., and charged him with helping Jones rape a young white woman. In this way local whites hoped to fabricate a charge against Jones, for after beating Harris the young man, fearing for his life, told them that

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[25]"The Social Front: Violence," ibid. (August-September 1946), 4-5; Press release, September 5, 1946, in "Minden La. Lynching," GOF, NAACP Papers; Pittsburgh Courier, August 24, 1946.

he and the veteran had attempted the rape. A few days later Jones joined Harris in jail, but on August 8 authorities were forced to release them because the alleged victim insisted that neither of the prisoners fitted the description of her assailant.[26]

That evening the police watched Harris and Jones walk out of the Minden jail and into the hands of ten white men lying in wait. After abducting the blacks, the whites drove to an isolated area along Bayou Dorcheat, several miles north of town, and began beating them. Harris lost consciousness and the whites, assuming he was dead, turned their full attention to Jones. The beating soon turned into a sadistic spree and the lynchers used a meat cleaver and acetylene torch. Satisfied that they had taken care of the area's principal black troublemaker, they left. Harris regained consciousness shortly thereafter and stumbled home. His father hastily placed him in an auto and sped away.[27]

For a week the lynching remained shrouded in secrecy. Local authorities, who obviously participated in the overall plan, were anxious that news of the crime remained a local matter. Whites in the area shared the same concern, while local blacks dared not talk. Finally, on August 15, the date of Jones' funeral, news leaked out. Immediately, the story appeared in several Louisiana newspapers, and Daniel E. Byrd, head of the

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[26]Daniel E. Byrd to NAACP national office, undated, in "Minden La. Lynching--Correspondence"; Affidavit of Albert Harris, Jr., August 29, 1946, in "Minden La. Lynching," GOF, NAACP Papers; Pittsburgh Courier, September 7, 1946.

[27]Pittsburgh Courier, September 7, 1946; Atlanta Constitution, August 16, 1946; New York Times, August 16, 1946; Press release, August 19, 1946; Affidavit of Albert Harris, Jr., August 29, 1946, in "Minden La. Lynching," GOF, NAACP Papers.

state's NAACP branches, telephoned Walter White. On August 22 White contacted the Justice Department, and once again investigators went to work.

The NAACP's main hope in effecting prosecution rested with Albert Harris, but his father had taken him to an undisclosed city. Realizing that his testimony would provide the only real evidence of a violation of civil rights, the association decided to search for him. After two weeks, NAACP investigator Madison S. Jones found Harris in Muskegon, Michigan, and persuaded him to fly to New York and swear out an affidavit. By the end of August, Harris had revealed the story to Justice Department officials, and on that information the department plunged into the case.[28]

Results came quickly. On October 18 a federal grand jury in Monroe, Louisiana, indicted six white men on charges of violating the Fourteenth Amendment and related civil rights statutes. The Justice Department quickly dropped all charges against one of the defendants for lack of evidence, and when a federal district court trial began on February 14, 1947, five accused lynchers faced conviction. As in the grand jury hearing, Albert Harris provided the crucial testimony. U. S. District Attorney Malcolm Lafargue, the chief prosecutor, argued that Harris had been arrested and confined to jail on a false pretext and that the defendants lynched Jones and tried to lynch Harris from personal vendettas. He also charged that the mob members and lawmen planned the incident together.

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[28]Pittsburgh Courier, August 24, 31, 1946; Theron L. Caudle to Smith, August 22, 1946, Justice Department Records; "Along the NAACP Battlefront," Crisis, 53 (October 1946), 309-10; Press release, September 5, 1946; Interoffice memorandum, undated, in "Minden La. Lynching--Correspondence," GOF, NAACP Papers.

The defense, led by A. S. Drew, complained that the FBI had come into the state like a "swarm of locusts" and had used intimidation and threats in securing evidence for the October grand jury. During the final summation, Drew resorted to wailing over "the sanctity of our womanhood" and protested the interference of "that negro uplift society up north." Elements in the East, he grumbled, were trying to force "co-mingling of blacks and whites." Lafargue countered by asserting, "I come from this state, my grandfathers had slaves, but to me civil liberties mean human rights, God-given rights, for all Americans. If you want a feudal society, with overlords, or a Hitler or Mussolini government then this country is not for you." After less than two hours of deliberation the all-white jury acquitted the defendants.[29]

The wave of lynchings continued into the late summer and fall as hostility against blacks, and especially veterans, remained high. In mid-August a band of twenty whites hunted down and killed a twenty-year-old ex-soldier, J. C. Farmer. A farmhand who lived near Wilson, North Carolina, he fought with a local constable and shot the lawman in the hand with the officer's gun. Enraged citizens tracked down the fleeing Farmer and killed him near his home. On August 12 three whites shot and killed James Walker in front of his house near Elko, South Carolina, the result of a squabble in a local bar. Walker had incurred the enmity of whites in the area, since he was a member of the Charleston branch of the NAACP. Later in the month a coroner's jury decided that the Walker killing

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[29]Pittsburgh Courier, October 26, 1946; "Along the NAACP Battlefront," Crisis, 53 (December 1946), 373; ibid., 54 (April 1947), 116; Caudle to Malcolm E. Lafargue, November 21, 1946, Justice Department Records; Press release, March 7, 1947, in "Minden La. Lynching," GOF, NAACP Papers.

constituted "justifiable homicide," and the Justice Department concluded that the incident did not fall within its jurisdiction.[30]

Although never officially confirmed, two lynchings occurred in mid-August near Marshall, Texas. In the July 27 primary election the Army stationed MPs at Marshall's polling places (as it did elsewhere) to protect black veterans as they voted. This irritated many of Marshall's conservative whites, and in mid-August two veterans, Richard Gordon and Alonza Brooks, died in separate incidents at the hands of white mobs. The local police reported Gordon's death to have resulted from a hit-and-run driver but offered no explanation of why his throat had been slashed from ear to ear or why the rest of the body bore definite marks of having been dragged behind an automobile. Brooks died the same week, but his body remained undiscovered until three days after his death. Again, the corpse showed signs of lynching. In both cases the police proved uncooperative, but eyewitness accounts enabled NAACP investigators to piece the stories together. No legal action results in either of the lynchings.[31]

Yet lynching declined after World War II in the South. There would be other killings, especially during the civil rights revolution, but the tradition of mob lynching was passing from the scene. In assessing such

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[30]Pittsburgh Courier, August 24, 31, 1946; "Memorandum on Elko, S. C. Lynching," by John H. McCray; Caudle to Robert L. Carter, September 6, 1946, in "Elko S. C.," GOF, NAACP Papers.

[31]Press release, August 22, 1946, in "Lynching--1946," GOF, NAACP Papers; "Along the NAACP Battlefront," Crisis, 53 (October 1946), 311. Other incidents reported included the lynching of John Gilbert on August 3 near Gordon, Georgia, and the lynching of Dan Carter Sanders on November 18 near Smithfield, North Carolina. Various sources during 1946 continually referred to mysterious deaths that never appeared in print.

violence, the most arresting fact is that lynchings continued long after the legal system caught up with America's vigilante tradition. As late as World War II, the United States still suffered from a form of violence that federal laws did not expressly prohibit. Since lynching had increasingly become a southern problem, it reflected the violent side of a rigidly enforced caste system based on race. The decline of lynching after the war era resulted from a return to more prosperous times, increased efforts especially on the federal level to stop it, the return of black southerners to a traditional position within the racial system, and the continued exodus of blacks from the South. Peace and relatively tranquil domestic life added to the factors that helped cause the virtual disappearance of the concentrated lynchings that had plagued the South for decades. Civil rights legislation later effectively ended the lynching threat.

Proof of the interracial hostility generated by postwar tensions and particularly by economic competition came not only from the lynching wave of mid-1946, but also from the Athens, Alabama, race riot. Like the Columbia riot of February, the Athens incident took place in a small city and reflected the problems of unemployment, veterans' rights, and strained race relations caused chiefly by white desires to force blacks back into prewar political and economic positions. Although it proved a relatively small occurrence, it merited national attention in part because conditions existed in many other cities that could have caused similar disorders. It showed once again that the white South's concern over fissures in the color line, compounded by economic competition between whites and blacks, led the majority forcibly to attempt a return

to prewar standards and in the process threatened modest wartime gains by blacks.

Athens, a city of about 4,300, lay about twenty miles south of the state's northern boundary, near Huntsville. Decatur, the scene of the Scottsboro trials, was about fifteen miles southwest. The city served as the seat of Limestone County and contained about nine hundred blacks. The region's economy depended upon cotton, so Athens was a typical farm town, providing the necessities of an agrarian populace.[32]

In mid-1946 Athens labored under a host of postwar difficulties, most of which resulted from unemployment and other economic problems. By 1943 the county had lost 11.1 percent of its population to urban-industrial centers, characteristic of many rural counties. At war's end the area still suffered from this loss. Returning veterans and defense workers made up part of the wartime decline, but the county's population still fell short of 1940 levels. In addition, veterans brought unanticipated problems. As unemployment rose, more veterans returned, worsening the economic situation. Desperate for jobs, many whites tried to take over jobs held by blacks.

Veterans also brought political problems. Former GIs, both black and white, wanted to assure themselves of a political voice in Athens, so in the 1946 primary they ran a GI ticket to replace entrenched politicians. This resulted in a sizeable increase in black voting, from fifty or sixty to over three hundred, most of whom were former soldiers. The

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[32]L. Maynard Catchings, "Analysis of the August 10th, 1946, Racial Disturbance at Athens, Limestone County, Alabama," August 14, 1946, Johnson Papers, Box 143.

ex-GIs lost, but they were heartened by the successful GI revolt in nearby Athens, Tennessee. In that election a faction of the Crump machine that ruled most of the state fell to a GI ticket. Open warfare accompanied the balloting which resulted in three deaths and fifty injuries. Veterans in Alabama's Athens looked with a mixture of pride and envy upon that political coup.[33]

A rigid hierarchy among Limestone County whites added to area difficulties. Two distinct classes existed, the townspeople and prosperous farmers, and the lower class subsistence-level whites who inhabited enclaves outside of town. A familiar southern paradox prevailed: even though the lower class whites and blacks shared economic and political goals, poor whites hated blacks more than anyone else. The "better" sort of whites, meanwhile, exhibited contempt for both of the "meaner" groups.

To further compound the problem, some black veterans returning to Athens demanded fair treatment from whites. Having served in the fight for democracy, they made it plain that they intended to exercise their rights. More conservative blacks must have counseled moderation in view of postwar tensions, but even the sight of a black veteran brought to whites the disconcerting picture of a new and dangerous threat to the local system of race relations and the sanctity of the color line.[34]

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[33] Ibid.; U. S., Bureau of the Census, "Civilian Population by Counties: November 1, 1943," pp. 3-5; Nashville Tennessean, August 2, 1946; Birmingham World, August 16, 1946.

[34] Catchings, "Analysis of Racial Disturbance at Athens," Johnson Papers.

On August 10, a Saturday, the tense racial situation exploded. As a farm community, Athens became on Saturdays a city of twice its normal size as citizens from the hinterland, both black and white, converged to conduct their weekly business. Some people milled around the main streets, and stores did a brisk trade, while others simply loafed or took in the town's modest amusements. Around midday a shoving match occurred in front of the town's only theater, the Ritz. L. C. Horton, a black veteran and employee of the theater, and two white brothers, Ben and Roy Massey, the former a veteran and the other an Army private, began jostling each other. Horton struck one of the whites and fled around the corner of the theater toward the "colored" entrance. The police arrived immediately and arrested the two whites on charges of public drunkenness. As word of the incident spread, whites became infuriated at the thought of two whites locked behind bars while the black man escaped punishment. Within a few minutes a crowd of several hundred whites collected, chiefly younger men led by poor whites from surrounding areas.[35]

The mob moved toward the theater, surrounded it, and prepared to storm the building in an attempt to locate the black fugitive. At that juncture Judge D. L. Rosenau arrived and persuaded the crowd to appoint six of its members to search the building. A search failed to produce Horton. Enraged, the mob drifted over to the jail and tore down the front door, attempting to free the Massey brothers. Fearing that the edifice might suffer considerable damage, city officials hurriedly arranged for the release of the prisoners to their father's custody. The incident

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[35] Ibid.; Huntsville Times, August 11, 12, 1946.

might have stopped there, but one of the ringleaders took the opportunity during this momentary lull to climb upon a bread truck and harangue the crowd about how the law had turned "partial" to blacks and that they had been getting "out of their places." Worked up to a frenzy, the mob of about two thousand then split into smaller groups and began beating blacks and chasing them from town.[36]

The disturbance lasted four hours, and an estimated fifty to one hundred blacks received injuries. J. R. Powell of Nashville, a Baptist minister, did not suspect trouble until he alighted from a bus and fell into the hands of an angry throng. Another black who worked for a local businessman was surrounded and threatened if he did not give up his job to a white man. The manager of the store arranged for the black man's escape to his home but otherwise did nothing to protect him. Other small bands invaded stores along the main streets where blacks worked and demanded their replacement with whites. If they encountered resistance they often pounced upon the black employee in question. In one case a band of rioters invaded a business and demanded that a black employee be replaced, whereupon the manager asked the whites if they would accept the job his black worker held. One of the whites asked how much he earned, learned that the job paid $25 per week, and revealed that it would take $35 for him to accept the position. In other cases white proprietors took firm stands against the whites, who then wandered back into the streets to beat the first blacks they encountered. Clearly, tensions brought

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[36]Catchings, "Analysis of Racial Disturbance at Athens," Johnson Papers; Huntsville Times, August 11, 12, 1946; Guzman, Negro Year Book, 253-54; Birmingham World, August 13, 1946.

by interracial economic competition proved crucial in producing much of the violence.

Many blacks escaped unharmed. As soonas the violence broke out, a few businessmen drove their black workers home where they remained in the relative security of the black community. Others simply fled the city before falling into the hands of the rioters. A white filling station operator locked his black employee, Robert Caldwell, in the "white" restroom where no one thought of looking. And one black man, caught in the downtown area, surprised his would-be assailants by driving them away with a knife.

During the outbreak the local law authorities stood helpless. The combined forces of the police and sheriff's departments numbered a paltry eight men unable to cope with the violence. Recognizing the hopelessness of the situation, Mayor R. H. Richardson hurriedly phoned the governor's office in Montgomery but discovered that Chauncey Sparks had gone fishing. George C. Clear, the state's adjutant general, responded in the governor's absence by ordering elements of the state guard to the embattled area, and fifty state troopers raced to the scene. These men, however, reached Athens after the major violence had subsided. By midnight law officials had the city under occupation, and a semblance of order returned.[37]

Without delay embarrassed city officials arrested nine whites, charged them with unlawful assembly, and jailed them. Eight of the nine

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[37]Catchings, "Analysis of Racial Disturbance at Athens," Johnson Papers; Birmingham World, August 13, 1946; Pittsburgh Courier, August 17, 1946; New York Times, August 12, 1946, p. 21; Huntsville Times, August 11, 12, 1946.

turned out to be teenagers, the youngest of whom was thirteen years old. The main contingent of the rioters, residents of the poor white sections of Limestone County, provided the city administration with a scapegoat for the incident since most of them were not residents of the city. The next day, Sunday, only two of the city's black churches held services as the victims remained at home dressing their wounds; Limestone County contained no jim crow hospital. Mayor Richardson called an interracial meeting for Sunday night, and prominent blacks and whites congregated to discuss the problem. Richardson and his associates used the occasion to disclaim complicity in the incident and promised complete protection for the black community; the black conferees accepted the mayor's assurances. In reality, of course, most blacks remained hostile and bitter.

The lawmen from outlying areas remained in Athens for several days following the riot to make sure violence did not recur. A rumored assault on the jail to release the nine whites held in connection with the affray never took place, probably because of the presence of the state authorities. In the immediate wake of Saturday's incident, local whites expressed little remorse, and as one of them noted, there was "gonna be more trouble, too. It's got to the place white folks can't walk on the streets for niggers. It's nigger GIs that's getting out of their place."[38]

The city took immediate but relatively mild action against the ringleaders of the mob while the Justice Department, following a cursory examination, remained out of the picture. On August 12 officials ordered

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[38]Catchings, "Analysis of Racial Disturbance at Athens," Johnson Papers; "Trouble at Athens, Alabama," Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations, 4 (August-September 1946), 50-51; Birmingham World, August 16, 1946.

a special session of the county grand jury convened. Circuit Solicitor George C. Johnson declared, "I will not tolerate mob rule in Limestone County" and asserted that the riot represented "a disgrace to a town that has for more than 150 years had no race disturbance." On August 23, after hearing seventy-seven witnesses, the jury indicted sixteen whites on various misdemeanor charges. In April 1947 a non-jury court convicted eleven of these persons and fined them $80 plus court costs. Justice had been done while the light penalties assured no permanent discomfort to the defendants.[39]

The Athens riot reflected forms of collective behavior common to other mob actions of the war years. First and foremost, perceived threats against the racial caste system resulted in the appearance of a determined defense of traditional racial patterns that characterized much of the white South from 1940 through 1946. Many whites, unable to cope with changes in the racial system or other alterations in political or economic areas, drew together in opposition and lashed out at the most accessible symbol of their problems. Blacks, who hoped to gain permanent changes for the better in the wake of the war, saw their hopes dashed against the formidable color line and emerged from the entire experience frustrated and bitter. Jobs seemed to be at the heart of the Athens riot, and along with heightened tensions that returning veterans brought, the general atmosphere of postwar confusion and the deterioration of race

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[39]Caudle to J. Edgar Hoover, August 19, 1946, Justice Department Records; New York Times, August 13, 1946, p. 16; August 24, 1946, p. 13; Birmingham World, August 16, 1946; Pittsburgh Courier, August 31, 1946; Huntsville Times, August 23, 1946; "The Social Front: Violence," Events and Trends in Race Relations: A Monthly Summary, 4 (May 1947), 302.

relations produced conditions that many other southern towns and cities faced. The riot unfortunately forced blacks and whites even further apart, and with separation came a loss of interracial understanding. On the surface blacks had to play traditionally subservient roles, but underneath indignation festered. Athens blacks, like others in the South, felt betrayed.

The racial violence of late 1945 and 1946 shocked civil rights groups and spurred them to seek redress. The Columbia riot, the lynchings of mid-1946, the Athens riot, and other incidents provoked concerned organizations to find solutions even as the violence continued. On August 6, 1946, a thoroughly aroused NAACP convened a meeting of these groups and formed the National Emergency Committee Against Mob Violence. In issuing the call, Walter White emphasized that it would act as a "working conference to devise and implement most effective methods of organizational, governmental and public action on forces of bigotry which threaten all Americans." In addition to the NAACP, the Southern Regional Council, Southern Conference for Human Welfare, American Federation of Labor, American Jewish Congress, National Urban League, American Civil Liberties Union, and thirty-three other groups convened. Spurred by the Monroe lynching, one of the new committee's first actions was to send a telegram to President Truman expressing its condemnation of that incident as well as those that had preceded it. Truman proved receptive, and on September 19 a delegation met with him to discuss the problem of increasing mob violence.[40]

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[40]White to "various organizations," undated; National Emergency Committee Against Mob Violence to Harry S. Truman and Tom Clark, August

At the same time a group known as the American Crusade to End Lynching began a series of publicity activities, which included a hundred-day campaign climaxed by a September 23 meeting with Truman. This delegation, headed by Paul Robeson, delivered a three-point plan to the President that requested apprehension and punishment of lynchers, a federal anti-lynching law, and removal of the Klan from the Senate--an obvious reference to Theodore G. Bilbo. The crusade also sponsored a mass rally at the Lincoln Memorial that attracted five thousand spectators.[41]

These campaigns and the rising tide of violence managed to jolt the federal government into action. Attorney General Clark called upon "every loyal citizen and law enforcement officer" to help prevent mob violence. "Every resource at my command as the head of your Department of Justice has been marshaled and has been ordered into action to discover the perpetrators of the horrible crimes which have been committed." Clark then declared that "the time has come when Congress may have to pass legislation to insure to all citizens the guarantees under the Constitution." Congress made a gesture toward an anti-lynching bill but did little else. In response to Clark's appeal and continued violence, Senators James M. Mead and Robert F. Wagner laid plans to rescue such a bill, introduced on August 2, that had disappeared in the Judiciary Committee. Their efforts succeeded in raising concern over lynching but failed to

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6, 1946; Press release, September 19, 1946, in "National Emergency Committee on Mob Violence," GOF, NAACP Papers.

[41]"The Monroe, Georgia, Lynching Case," Monthly Summary of Events and Trends in Race Relations, 4 (October 1946), 77-78.

revive the legislation. More significant, Truman created the Committee on Civil Rights, a direct outgrowth of the protests against postwar violence. Established in December, the committee consisted of fifteen prominent persons who issued a report in October 1947 condemning segregation and discrimination in government institutions. Truman hailed the report and proposed civil rights reforms based on its recommendations that seriously threatened southern racial traditions and led to a split in the Democratic Party by 1948. While the Committee on Civil Rights sparked widespread discussion, however, effective implementation of most of its recommendations came only after the mid-1950s.[42]

A fitting end to the postwar racial violence in the South came in late 1946 with the collapse of the Talmadge era in Georgia and the Bilbo reign in Mississippi. Negrophobic politics in the 1946 elections emerged as one of the roots of the racial violence of that year, coming as it did in the midst of postwar reconversion difficulties, so the deaths of two of the most vitriolic perpetrators of racial hatred served as the symbolic end of an era. After winning both the primary and general elections for governor on an anti-black campaign, Eugene Talmadge gratified his opponents by suddenly dying on December 21. Theodore Bilbo fell from power in more ignominious fashion. Because of his unabashed threats against blacks who tried to vote in 1946, a Senate committee decided to investigate his campaign. The NAACP in Mississippi proved instrumental in this development. The national office recognized that this hearing could eventually bar

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[42]Pittsburgh Courier, August 24, 31, 1946; Roland, Improbable Era, 31-33.

Bilbo from the Senate, so it bent every effort toward that end.[43]

Its efforts proved fruitless. After four days of hearings, the committee, chaired by South Carolina Senator Burnet R. Maybank, decided that Bilbo had done nothing wrong during the primary campaign. Even though the Mississippi senator had repeatedly urged his white constituents "to resort to any means" in stopping the black voting threat, the evidence against him did not appear to carry much weight during the proceedings. A concurrent Senate War Investigating Committee hearing into Bilbo's activities with state war contractors had a greater impact on his downfall, for in the end it decided to condemn his activities and table his credentials prior to the swearing in date. Bilbo never returned to Congress, and in late August he died of cancer.[44]

Bilbo's fate, along with that of Talmadge, in a symbolic sense marked the end of racial violence in the South during World War II. Violence did not end, of course, with the death of Talmadge or the downfall of Bilbo. Nor did the violence stop at the end of the year. Acts of lynching and other mob violence continued into 1947, but on a lesser scale as it appeared to die out with each passing month.[45] As the nation

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[43]Anderson, Wild Man, 236; White to Allen J. Ellender, November 23, 1946, in "Meeting Wash.--Sept. 24--re: Bilbo," LF, NAACP Papers.

[44]U. S., Congress, Senate, Hearings before the Special Committee to Investigate Senatorial Campaign Expenditures, Mississippi, 1-11, 23-37, 333-44; Richard C. Ethridge, "The Fall of the Man: The United States Senate's Probe of Theodore G. Bilbo in December 1946, and Its Aftermath," Journal of Mississippi History, 38 (August 1976), 243-44, 248-55; A. Wigfall Green, The Man Bilbo (Baton Rouge, 1963), 109-19.

[45]For a summary of the violence of 1947 through the middle of the year, see "The Social Front: Violence," Events and Trends in Race Relations: A Monthly Summary, 4 (July 1947), 365-68.

successfully reconverted and the abnormal years of World War II receded into memory, the violence directly associated with it correspondingly expired. The summer of 1946, as part of the overall spate of postwar violence, reflected the continued attempt by whites to force blacks out of the American mainstream and in the process kept the battered system of race relations from healing. The postwar violence represented the most obvious reaction of a society unsure of itself and marked one of the two high points of racial discord during the entire war era.

World War II left a mixed legacy for black southerners. In certain restricted areas they enjoyed modest gains, such as in employment and politics. Yet in the immediate postwar months many of those advancements disappeared, and in other areas the situation remained at or near prewar standards. Traditional racial mores had caused separation, and with separation came a loss of interracial communication. The violence of the war years was the most obvious reaction to real or perceived threats by blacks against racial traditions on which the white majority placed disproportionate emphasis. Instability and confusion characterized the years from 1940 through 1946 in the South, prompting violent reaction against black gains. The South did not experience all of the wartime racial discord, but suffered most of it because rigid racial mores held vast importance, and the majority of America's blacks lived there. In the end, little improvement for black southerners could be seen, whether in small towns like Columbia, Tennessee, or in cities like Beaumont, Texas, or Mobile, Alabama. The one area in which black militancy ignited violence, the military, came from the bitter realization that fighting for democracy abroad apparently did not entitle black GIs to equal rights

at home. Such violence only produced more intense reaction from whites who viewed black soldier militance as dangerous and contagious.

Southern blacks remained repressed, bitter, and alienated until the mid-1950s, despite the firm stand that President Truman took on civil rights. Changes in the nature of race relations could have been permanently effected during the war years in the South if whites had not reacted so forcibly, but such alterations seemed too drastic at the time. Changes had to come from the grassroots level as well as from the top, and this did not occur until after 1954. From the mid-1950s through the 1960s the federal government and a new generation of blacks and whites tried to implement those long-overdue modifications. The Second Reconstruction did not begin in the South until the fifth decade of the twentieth century.

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