

Fight for Desegregation

GRADES 9-12



Overview

This activity is geared toward participants in grades 9-12. The estimated amount of time to deliver this lesson is 75 minutes.

During World War II, many Black Americans serving in the Navy were often relegated to low-ranking positions, mirroring the Jim Crow laws at home. Advocacy groups seeking equity in the armed services and defense industries put pressure on the government to consider more opportunities for service.

This pressure led to creation of committees with the goal of advocating for minority groups. In this lesson, participants will explore these actions taken by these groups that led to the desegregation of the armed forces in 1948.

Content Warning: In this lesson, the term "negro" is used to describe Black Americans. At the time, this term was not considered offensive, however today is considered inappropriate. Please preview the lesson materials and discuss with your students in advance.



Objective

Participants will be able to identify different forms of advocacy that led up to the desegregation of the armed forces in 1948.



Materials

- Library of Congress Photos
- Proposed March on Washington Pamphlet
- Activity 1: Defining the Problem
- Activity 2: Examining Executive Order 9981
- Executive order 9981



Inquiry

Share 1943-1945 USS *Intrepid* cruise book photo. This photograph shows a page out of a Navy cruise book, which is somewhat like a yearbook for the Navy, which can tell us what life was like during the time the cruise book was published and who was working in different departments on a ship. This page shows the 1943-1945 Supply Department of the USS *Intrepid*, which was responsible for feeding the crew, paying the crew and keeping track of all goods needed for the operation of the ship.

- What do you notice looking at the photograph on the top of the page and the photograph on the bottom of the page?
- What differences stand out to you?

Ask participants to share what they know about what opportunities may have been available for groups identified in the cruise books in the United States during World War II. Share images of segregation within the United States during that time. Ask participants:

- How might what is seen in the United States during this time impact opportunities for Black sailors during World War II?



Investigation

Putting on Pressure

Show the “Call to Black America” pamphlet. Remind participants that before and during the time of World War II, Navy regulations reflected broader social inequities back at home. Ask participants to share their observations reading the pamphlet. Have participants discuss:

- What were the goals of the march?
- How could a march like this help the organizers achieve these goals?

After validating responses, you can use the following background to guide discussion, noting that this is not the same March on Washington under Martin Luther King, Jr.

Discriminatory Practices in Naval Service

Provide background on what led up to the proposed March on Washington in 1941 and why it was canceled. Discuss how the United States entry into World War II might have led to more activism around Black participation in the military, especially since the demand for manpower was so high. Share how in 1942, the Navy began permitting Black people to enlist in the general service;

however, most Black sailors continued to serve as stewards, cooks or laborers. Share the excerpt from the Gaines memo. Ask participants:

- What did officers at the time assume about Steward's mates (StM's) at this time?
- How could racist expectations keep Black sailors in low skilled positions?

Advocacy within Government

Share information about President Truman's Commission on Civil Rights. Have participants read the following excerpt from "Robert Carr to the President's Committee on Civil Rights, June 10, 1947," which highlights problems Black servicemembers faced while serving in World War II. Ask participants:

- How might the problems that Robert K. Carr identifies impact Black sailors in the Navy?
- Before service? During service? After service?



Discussing Potential Impacts of Advocacy

Share how President Truman called on Congress to enact recommendations from the Commission on Civil Rights and the response from Southern senators. Share the purpose of Executive Order 9981.

- What actions led up to the desegregation of the armed forces? Who was involved?
- What is the impact of having leaders such as A. Philip Randolph putting pressure on the government? What is the impact of someone in a government appointed committee advocating for a group?

Exploring "Executive Order 9981"

Have participants read "Executive Order 9981" and respond to questions using the "Activity 2: Examining Executive Order 9981" worksheet.

- How does Executive Order 9981 address the problems brought up in Robert K. Carr's memorandum to the Committee on Civil Rights? Which problems does it not address?
- What could potential solutions be to the problems not addressed in the executive order?



Lesson Connection

Have participants listen to the oral histories of Black sailors serving during World War II, such as: John Seagraves, Henry Mouzon and Theodore Jackson. Please see our lesson: **Limits on Black Sailors in World War II.**



Background

Putting on Pressure

Before and during the time of World War II, Navy regulations reflected broader social inequities back at home. The March on Washington Movement (MOWM) formed in the early 1940s to protest segregation in the armed forces and the defense industries. Desegregation in defense industries was a major focus since the United States was not yet involved in World War II.

Early lobbying efforts to desegregate the military and the defense industries had not persuaded President Franklin Roosevelt to take action. On January 25, A. Philip Randolph, the President of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, proposed the idea of a national, Black-led march on the capitol in Washington, D.C. to highlight the issue. The march was scheduled for July 1, 1941 but never happened.

President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802, which banned discriminatory employment practices by federal agencies and all unions and companies engaged in war-related work. However, the order did not desegregate the military. The signing of the executive order was seen as a victory for the activists, and the planners of the march agreed to cancel it. Randolph would later be a driving force behind the later March on Washington in 1963.

Discriminatory Practices in Naval Service

On December 7, 1941, following the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, the United States declared war on Japan. Three days later, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States, leading the United States to be fully engaged in World War II.

U.S. entry into World War II made the activism around Black participation in the military even more pressing. When the war started, the military needed more people. Each branch of the

military had their own requirements for service and limits on the capacities in which black servicemembers could serve. In March 1942, President Roosevelt ordered the Secretary of the Navy to allow more Black people to enlist.

The following month, the Navy began permitting Black people to enlist in the general service. However, most Black sailors continued to serve as stewards, cooks or laborers through the entirety of the United States' involvement in World War II. Attitudes towards black sailors during this time can be seen in the Gaines memorandum, which addresses officers about the role of steward's mates on board. The purpose of the memo is to set officers' expectations about what the steward's mates can and cannot do, given the shortage of steward's mates on the ship. The author of the memo uses condescending language in describing the steward's mates, presenting them as ignorant.

Advocacy within Government

President Harry Truman, Roosevelt's successor, appointed a panel in December 1946 to serve as the President's Commission on Civil Rights, which recommended "more adequate means and procedures for the protection of the civil rights of the people of the United States." This committee was formed of 15 members with various backgrounds, including businessmen, lawyers, activists, bishops, union leaders, scholars and diplomats.

When the commission issued its report, "To Secure These Rights," in October 1947, among its proposals were anti-lynching and anti-poll tax laws, a permanent Fair Employment Practices Committee and strengthening the civil rights division of the Department of Justice. Robert K. Carr, the executive director of President Truman's Commission on Civil Rights and one of the authors of the Commission's report, wrote to the committee in June 1947 regarding policies impacting Black Americans in the armed forces. In this memorandum, Carr states,

"The importance of the armed forces in the struggle of minority groups for full achievement of their civil rights is too obvious to require labored discussion.* The armed forces are one of our major status symbols; the fact that members of minority groups successfully bear arms in defense of their country, alongside other citizens, serves as a major basis for their claim to equality elsewhere.

For the minority groups themselves discrimination in the armed forces seems more immoral and painful than elsewhere. The notion that not even in the defense of their country (which discriminates against them in many ways) can they fight, be wounded, or even killed on an equal basis with others, is infuriating."

Executive Order 9981

In February 1948, President Truman called on Congress to enact recommendations from the Commission on Civil Rights. When Southern Senators immediately threatened a filibuster to delay decisions on these recommendations, Truman moved ahead on civil rights by using his executive powers. On July 26, 1948, he issued Executive Order 9981, abolishing segregation in the armed forces and ordering full integration of all branches.



Additional Resources/References

Executive Order 8802

<https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/executive-order-8802#:~:text=In%20June%20of%201941%2C%20President,to%20enforce%20the%20new%20policy.>

Executive Order 9981

<https://www.archivesfoundation.org/documents/executive-order-9981-ending-segregation-armed-forces/#:~:text=On%20July%2026%2C%201948%2C%20President,to%20integrating%20the%20segregated%20military>

Robert Carr to the President's Committee on Civil Rights

<https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/research-files/robert-carr-presidents-committee-civil-rights?documentid=NA&pagenumber=1>

Truman Library's collection on Desegregation of the Armed Forces:

<https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/online-collections/desegregation-of-armed-forces>

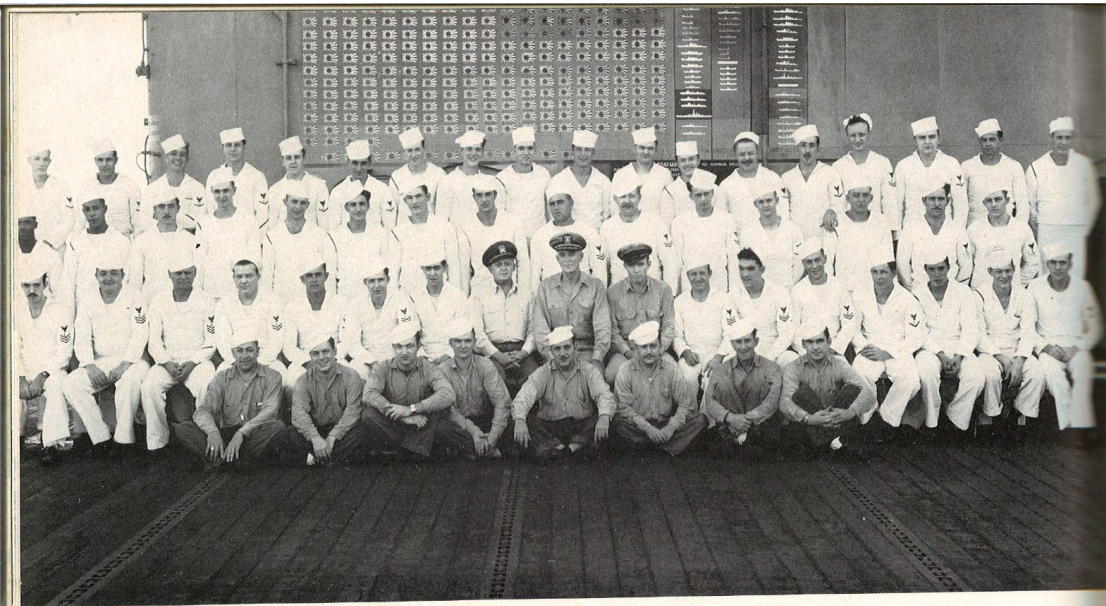


**NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE
HUMANITIES**

Full Muster: Inclusive Histories on Historic Naval Ships has been made possible in part by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities: Democracy demands wisdom.

Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this resource do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Documents and Images



Supply, the service department of the ship, feeds, clothes and pays the crew, in addition to operating the ship's canteens, fountains, and related personal services.

The General Stores section is charged with the task of ordering, stocking and issuing all consumable supplies, equipage, and spare parts, other than provisions, ship's store stock, clothing and aviation stores. Voluminous records must be maintained on all items in store, so as to facilitate the orderly replenishment without which the INTREPID could not operate.

All items of the enlisted man's uniform are available for sale on board, from pea coats to shoe strings. Clothing and Small stores average \$10,000 monthly in cash sales. Every man receives a quarterly cash clothing allowance of \$12.00 from the disbursing officer.



1943-1945 USS *Intrepid* cruise book page

Credit: Collection of the Intrepid Museum. 1945 USS *Intrepid* cruise book.

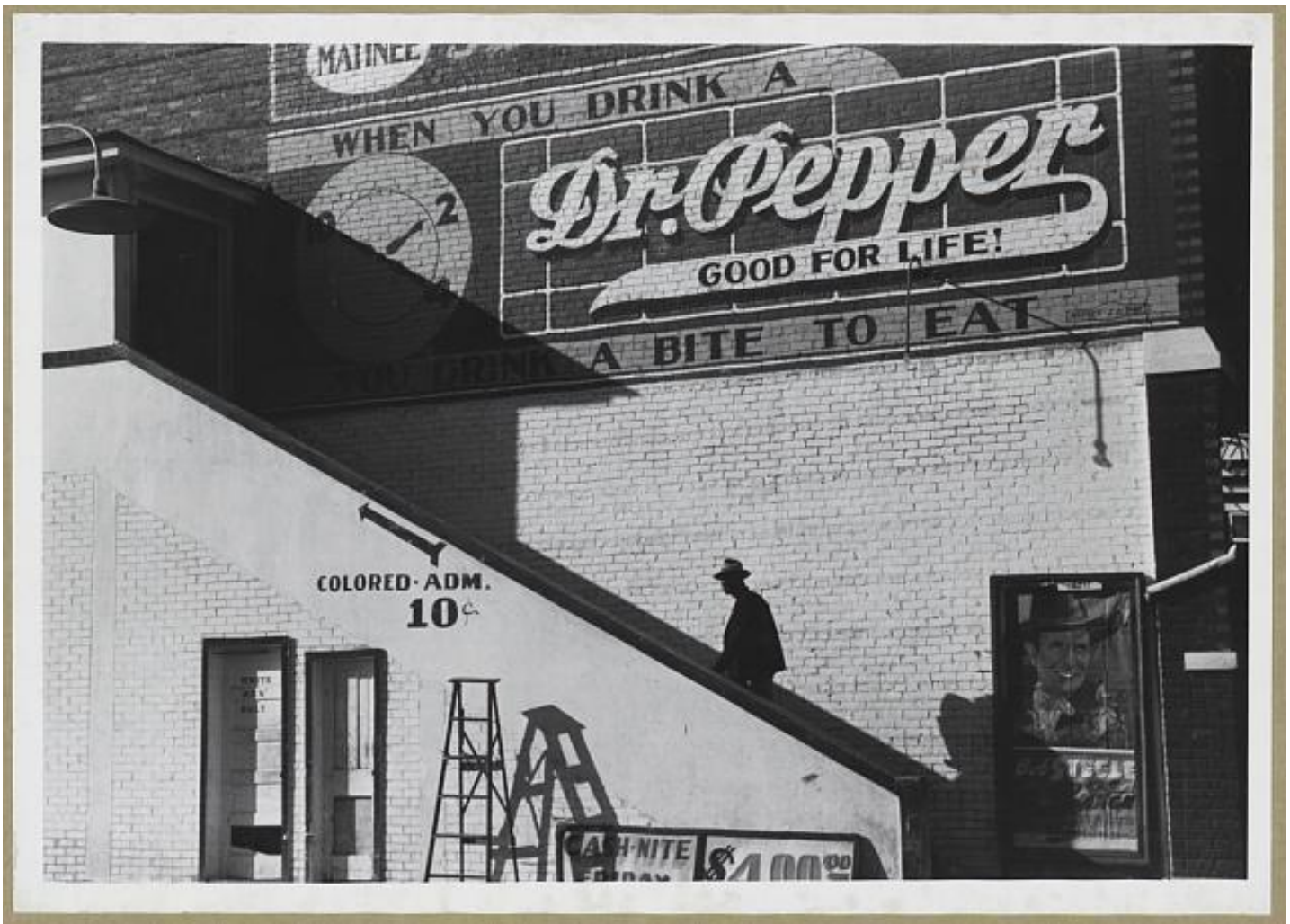
Transcript:

Supply, the service department of the ship, feeds, clothes, and pays the crew. In addition to operating the ship's canteens, fountains, and related personnel services. The General Stores section is charged with the task of ordering, stocking, and issuing all consumable supplies, equipage and spare parts, other than provisions, ship's store stock, clothing and aviation stores. Voluminous records must be maintained on all items in store, so as to facilitate the orderly replenishment without which the INTREPID could not operate. All items of the enlisted men's uniform are available for sale on board from pea coats to shoe strings. Clothing and Small Stores average \$10,000 monthly in cash sales. Every man receives a quarterly cash clothing allowance of \$12.00 from the distributing officer.



A Greyhound bus trip from Louisville, Kentucky, to Memphis, Tennessee, and the terminals. Waiting for a bus at the Memphis station, 1943

Credit: Library of Congress



Man going in colored entrance of movie house on Saturday afternoon, Belzoni, Mississippi Delta, Mississippi, 1939

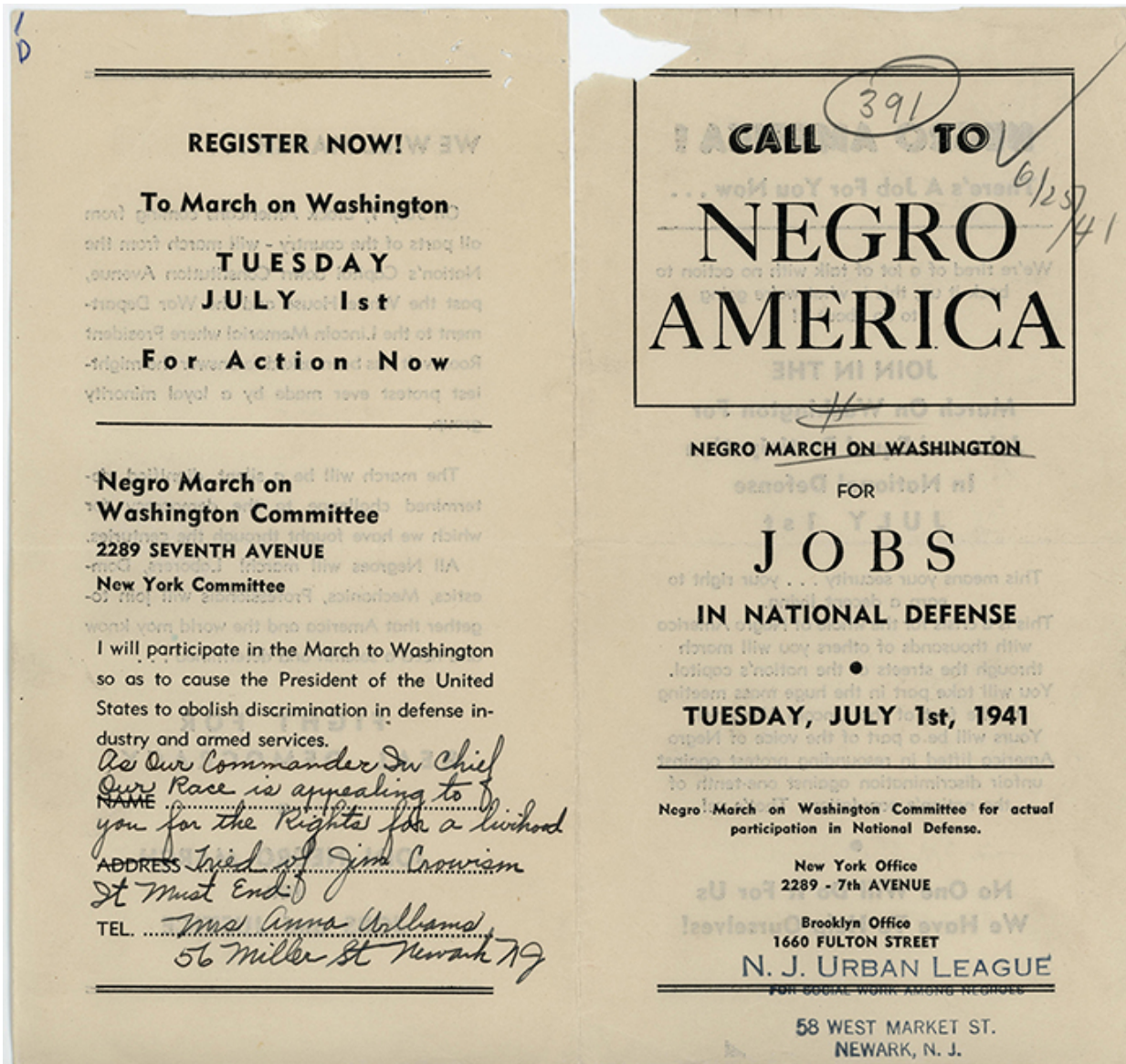
Credit: Library of Congress

Excerpt from “Robert Carr to the President's Committee on Civil Rights, June 10, 1947”

“The main problems confronting Negroes in the armed forces during the War were:

1. Severe limitations on their recruitment and promotion
2. Backlog of prejudice against them among white officers and men
3. The official policy of segregating them during their service (The one exception to this policy-and its results- will be discussed in another memorandum)
4. Tension between Negro soldiers and white civilians, particularly in Southern communities and in others where public transportation and recreation facilities were inadequate.”

Credit: Harry S. Truman Presidential Library & Museum



Negro March on Washington Pamphlet

Credit: Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library

Transcript:

Register Now!
 To March on Washington.
 Tuesday, July 1st
 For Action Now.

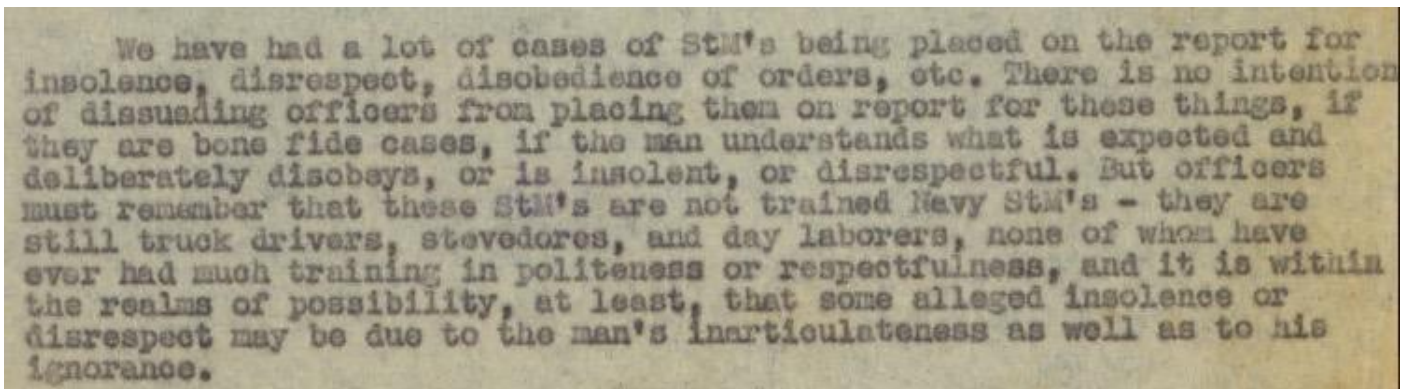
Negro March on Washington Committee
 2289 Seventh Avenue
 New York Committee

I will participate in the March on Washington so as to cause the President of the United States to abolish discrimination in defense industries and armed services.

In hand-written script: As our Commander-In-Chief. Our Race is appealing to you for the rights for a livelihood. Tired of Jim Crowism. It must end.

Mrs. Anna [unintelligible]
56 Miller Street Newark 719"

The section on the right reads: Call to Negro America
Negro March on Washington for Jobs for National Defense
Tuesday, July 1, 1941
Negro March on Washington for Actual participation in National Defense
New York Office
2289 Seventh Avenue
Brooklyn Office
1660 Fulton Street



We have had a lot of cases of StM's being placed on the report for insolence, disrespect, disobedience of orders, etc. There is no intention of dissuading officers from placing them on report for these things, if they are bone fide cases, if the man understands what is expected and deliberately disobeys, or is insolent, or disrespectful. But officers must remember that these StM's are not trained Navy StM's - they are still truck drivers, stevedores, and day laborers, none of whom have ever had much training in politeness or respectfulness, and it is within the realms of possibility, at least, that some alleged insolence or disrespect may be due to the man's inarticulateness as well as to his ignorance.

Excerpt from Richard K. Gaines Papers

Collection of the Intrepid Museum. Gift of Maud Gaines Tarrant. A2014.16

Transcript:

"We have had a lot of cases of StM's being placed on the report for insolence, disrespect, disobedience of orders, etc. There is no intention of dissuading officers from placing them on report for these things, if they are bona fide cases, if the man understands what is expected and deliberately disobeys, or is insolent, or disrespectful. But officers must remember that these StM's are not trained Navy StM's - they are still truck drivers, stevedores, and day laborers, none of whom have ever had much training in politeness or respectfulness, and it is within the realm of possibility, at least, that some are alleged insolence or disrespect may be due to the man's inarticulateness as well as to his ignorance."

EXECUTIVE ORDER

ESTABLISHING THE PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE ON
EQUALITY OF TREATMENT AND OPPORTUNITY IN
THE ARMED SERVICES

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

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

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

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

3. The Committee is authorized on behalf of the President to examine into the rules, procedures and practices of the armed services in order to determine in what respect such rules, procedures and practices may be altered or improved with a view to carrying out the policy of this order. The Committee shall confer and advise with the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary

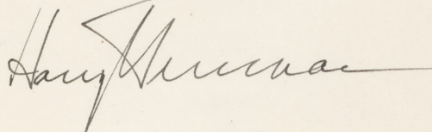
- 2 -

of the Army, the Secretary of the Navy, and the Secretary of the Air Force, and shall make such recommendations to the President and to said Secretaries as in the judgment of the Committee will effectuate the policy hereof.

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

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

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



THE WHITE HOUSE,

July 26, 1948.

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES
FILED AND MADE AVAILABLE
FOR PUBLIC INSPECTION
JUL 27 10 39 AM '48
IN THE DIVISION OF THE
FEDERAL REGISTER

9981

Executive Order 9981

Credit: National Archives and Records Administration

Transcript:

Establishing the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity In the Armed Forces.

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

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

1. It is hereby declared to be the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin. This policy shall be put into effect as rapidly as possible, having due regard to the time required to effectuate any necessary changes without impairing efficiency or morale.
2. There shall be created in the National Military Establishment an advisory committee to be known as the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services, which shall be composed of seven members to be designated by the President.
3. The Committee is authorized on behalf of the President to examine into the rules, procedures and practices of the Armed Services in order to determine in what respect such rules, procedures and practices may be altered or improved with a view to carrying out the policy of this order. The Committee shall confer and advise the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of the Army, the Secretary of the Navy, and the Secretary of the Air Force, and shall make such recommendations to the President and to said Secretaries as in the judgment of the Committee will effectuate the policy hereof.
4. All executive departments and agencies of the Federal Government are authorized and directed to cooperate with the Committee in its work, and to furnish the Committee such information or the services of such persons as the Committee may require in the performance of its duties.
5. When requested by the Committee to do so, persons in the armed services or in any of the executive departments and agencies of the Federal Government shall testify before the Committee and shall make available for use of the Committee such documents and other information as the Committee may require.
6. The Committee shall continue to exist until such time as the President shall terminate its existence by Executive order.

Harry Truman

The White House

July 26, 1948

ACTIVITY 1: DEFINING THE PROBLEM

“The main problems confronting Negroes in the armed forces during the War were:

1. Severe limitations on their recruitment and promotion
2. Backlog of prejudice against them among white officers and men
3. The official policy of segregating them during their service (The one exception to this policy-and its results- will be discussed in another memorandum)
4. Tension between Negro soldiers and white civilians, particularly in Southern communities and in others where public transportation and recreation facilities were inadequate.”

-“Robert Carr to the President's Committee on Civil Rights, June 10, 1947”

Directions: Look at each problem identified by Robert K. Carr. and share how each problem might impact a black sailor serving in the Navy.

Problem	How might it impact a black sailor serving in the Navy?
Severe limitations on their recruitment and promotion	
Backlog of prejudice against them among white officers and men	
The official policy of segregating them during their service	
Tension between Negro soldiers and white civilians	

