BLACK STUDIES RESEARCH SOURCES:
Microfilms from Major Archival and
Manuscript Collections

August Meier and Elliott Rudwick
General Editors

PRESIDENT TRUMAN'S
COMMITTEE ON
CIVIL RIGHTS

Edited by
William E. Juhnke

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Note on Sources

The materials used in this collection can be found at the Harry S Truman Presidential Library, Independence, Missouri. The materials in this collection are as complete as possible. It is recognized by the Library that a very few documents are incomplete.
Introduction

The President's Committee on Civil Rights (PCCR), appointed by Harry S Truman in late 1946, stands at a crucial juncture in the civil rights protest movement. Black Americans, who had made considerable advances during the Great Depression and World War II, faced the prospect of postwar reaction and indifference. However, through the medium of the PCCR, civil rights groups and the national government would reinforce each other's commitment to civil rights progress and increase the potential for civil rights change.

The 15 members Truman selected to serve on his blue-ribbon panel were prominent representatives from business, labor, education, and religious and service organizations: Charles E. Wilson, President of General Electric and Chairman of the PCCR; Charles Luckman, President of Lever Brothers; James B. Carey, Secretary-Treasurer of the Congress of Industrial Organizations; Boris Shishkin, economist for the American Federation of Labor; John S. Dickey, President of Dartmouth College; Frank P. Graham, President of the University of North Carolina; Francis J. Haas, Roman Catholic Bishop of Grand Rapids; Henry Knox Sherrill, presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church; Rabbi Roland B. Gittelsohn; Sadie T. Alexander, City Solicitor of Philadelphia; Channing H. Tobias, Director of the Phelps-Stokes Fund; Morris L. Ernst, lawyer for the American Civil Liberties Union; Francis P. Matthews, former head of the Knights of Columbus; Dorothy M. Tilly, field secretary for the Southern Regional Council; and Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr. (The staff was headed by Robert K. Carr, Chairman of the Department of Government at Dartmouth College.) Although the leading black activists were conspicuously absent from this group, the Committee was tilted slightly in favor of civil rights reform. Even the two southerners had been active on the civil rights front. This was a distinguished committee, whose members had, for the most part, made their reputations outside of government and politics. It was not likely to be cowed or ignored.
Following its instructions in Executive Order 9808, the Committee determined that its sole task was to prepare a report with recommendations for the President. To that end, it met 10 times from January to September 1947, solicited advice from over 250 individuals and organizations, and took formal testimony from nearly 40 experts in civil rights and civil liberties. In its report, *To Secure These Rights*, presented to Truman in October 1947, the Committee attacked segregation head-on, called on the federal government to take the lead for civil rights reform, and provided 34 far-reaching recommendations for specific national, state, and local action. With the PCCR report as inspiration, Truman would present, within a year, a Special Message on Civil Rights to Congress and issue executive orders to eliminate discrimination from the United States civil service and armed forces.

This microfilm collection brings together the various manuscript material in the Harry S Truman Library at Independence, Missouri, relative to the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, 1946-1948. There are some documents illuminating the origins of the PCCR and the promotion of its report. The bulk of the material, however, is on the operation and organization of the Committee itself. A study of these manuscript sources can reveal something of where the civil rights movement stood in 1946-1948, as well as the unique interaction of public and private interests with a presidential civil rights advisory committee.

There are documents from seven manuscript sources included in this collection. There are some materials from the Tom Clark Papers, the George M. Elsey Papers, the Frank P. Matthews Papers, and the Philleo Nash Papers. In this period Clark was Attorney General, Elsey was a presidential speech writer, Matthews was a PCCR member, and Nash was a White House advisor on minority affairs. Most of the documents, however, are from three record groupings in the Harry S Truman Papers: the Official File, the Files of Philleo Nash, and most importantly the Records of the President’s Committee on Civil Rights.

This collection of primary sources has a variety of types of manuscripts. A good portion of the material (about 2,000 pages) is correspondence, including some private letters, but mostly official correspondence with private groups, governmental agencies, and civil rights specialists. The richest and most extensive documents (over 2,500 pages) are the transcripts of the Committee meetings and the testimony of groups and individuals before the Committee. Another significant portion of the collection (over 2,500 pages) consists of materials on the report itself: various drafts, working papers, suggested revisions, galley proofs, documentation, and the final report. The collection also contains staff background studies, digests of information, agenda, minutes, news clippings, interim reports, discussion and decision
papers, drafts of speeches, and assorted working papers of the Committee and staff.

The general guideline in selecting the documents from the relevant manuscript sources at the Truman Library was to include specific material unless there were obvious reasons not to. The following classes of materials were excluded entirely: printed reference literature, travel vouchers, supplies requests, print orders, and personal distribution lists. Repetitious material was generally avoided although a large cross-reference correspondence file was included. News-clipping files were omitted if they were redundant and disorganized. Letters and telegrams were left out if they were short expressions of praise or concern, merely requested information from the Committee, or were filed as "crackpot" letters by the Committee staff.

The materials presented in this collection are organized as they are in the original manuscript sources. No effort was made to reorganize the materials or impose any kind of patterns on them. The documents appear here as they do in the Truman Library.

William E. Juhnke
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0574 Comments Against the Report of the President's Civil Rights Committee. 126pp.

Box 1513
0700 Comments Against the Report of the President's Civil Rights Committee. 83pp.

Tom Clark Papers
Attorney General Correspondence 1945–1949

Box No. (None)
0799 President's Committee on Civil Rights, 1947. 10pp.

George M. Elsey Papers
President's Committee on Civil Rights

Box 20
Frank P. Matthews Papers
President's Committee on Civil Rights

Box 14
1296 Agenda for Meetings. 19pp.

Box 16
1315 Appeals from Individuals, Organizations, Pressure Groups. 14pp.
1351 Correspondence, August–December 1947. 11pp.
1362 Correspondence, 1948. 9pp.

Philleo Nash Papers
President's Committee on Civil Rights

Box 36
BLACK STUDIES
RESEARCH SOURCES:
Microfilms from
Major Archival and
Manuscript Collections

NEW DEAL AGENCIES AND BLACK AMERICA
PRESIDENT TRUMAN’S COMMITTEE ON CIVIL RIGHTS
CONGRESS OF RACIAL EQUALITY (CORE) PAPERS
PAPERS OF THE NAACP

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