

HARRY S. TRUMAN, "ADDRESS BEFORE THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE," WASHINGTON, DC (29 JUNE 1947)

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Abstract: Harry S. Truman's keynote address to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People at the Lincoln Memorial was a watershed moment for the postwar civil rights movement. In his speech, the president deployed his own personal ethos, the physical location of his address, and the current Cold War historical context as evidence for his argument that "all Americans" were entitled to the full benefits of citizenship. This essay analyzes Truman's speech within its historical, political, and spatial contexts to demonstrate how and why this address was so remarkable and rhetorically significant.

Keywords: Harry S. Truman; Civil Rights; NAACP; Lincoln Memorial; Cold War

On June 29, 1947, Harry S. Truman became the first U.S. president to address the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in person. Speaking from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial at the closing session of the organization's thirty-eighth annual meeting, Truman argued that the United States had a moral duty to extend the full benefits of citizenship to all citizens, regardless of race, color, religion, or creed. Historian David McCullough writes that Truman's NAACP speech was "the strongest statement on civil rights heard in Washington since the time of Lincoln,"¹ and rhetorical critic Garth E. Pauley observes that Truman's speech was significant because he was "the first president to define civil rights as a crisis."² Truman's argument for federal civil rights legislation was notable, particularly because this speech came a full year before his decision to make race a central issue of his 1948 presidential campaign.³ Far from simply a political calculation, Truman's insistence that the U.S. government take active steps to secure civil rights for "all Americans" was a bold step as police brutality, lynchings, and Jim Crow transcended any supposed promise of racial justice on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line (2).⁴

The president's address to the NAACP also represents a pivotal moment in U.S. foreign policy as the United States struggled to formulate a response to what Winston Churchill famously described as the "iron curtain" descending over Eastern Europe.⁵ Even as he articulated his domestic civil rights program to the nation and to the world, Truman directly refuted critics—most notably, the Soviet Union—who claimed that the United States had no business preaching democracy to the rest of the world when it disenfranchised its own citizens. "At a time when the United States hoped to reshape the postwar world in its own image," writes historian Mary L. Dudziak, "the international attention given to racial segregation was troublesome and embarrassing. The focus of American foreign policy was to promote democracy and to 'contain' communism, but the international focus on U.S. racial problems

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meant that the image of American democracy was tarnished.”⁶ Thus, when Truman delivered the closing address at the NAACP conference, he spoke to a global audience—citizens and nations choosing between democracy and communism, the “two ways of life” Truman described in his “Truman Doctrine” address to Congress on March 12, 1947.⁷

In this essay, I analyze Truman’s Address to the NAACP and consider how the president defined his authority and *ethos*, constituted his audience as a nation of citizens responsible for extending the rights of citizenship to “all Americans,” and constructed this historical/temporal moment as a turning point in U.S. civil rights. To do this, I first examine Truman’s history with the issue of race relations to explain why his physical presence at the Lincoln Memorial on June 29, 1947 was so remarkable. I also describe the symbolic significance of the Lincoln Memorial within U.S. political culture at the time of Truman’s speech, paying particular attention to President Warren G. Harding’s dedication of the site in 1922 and Marian Anderson’s outdoor concert in 1939. I then offer a close reading of Truman’s address and analyze various responses to the address by political officials, the news media, and private citizens. I conclude by considering the significance of this particular address for the civil rights movement and successive presidential addresses delivered at the Lincoln Memorial. Ultimately, this analysis reveals how Truman situated his audience in place and time before extending these relational, spatial, and temporal metaphors beyond the immediate physical situation and onto the international stage as he set forth a vision for the metaphorical place the United States would occupy at the dawn of the Cold War.

Contextualizing Truman’s Speech to the NAACP

When Truman delivered the keynote address at the closing session of the thirty-eighth annual conference on June 29, 1947, his physical presence—both as President of the United States and as border-state Democrat whose grandparents were proud slave owners—lent executive and political authority to the issue of civil rights in the United States. Indeed, Truman’s southern upbringing and his own history with race relations made this particular address at the Lincoln Memorial to the NAACP all the more remarkable—and transformative. William E. Leuchtenburg writes that Truman “literally learned at his mother’s knee to share the South’s view of the War Between the States. . . . [and] acquired an abiding belief in white supremacy.” Years later, when Truman’s mother Martha visited her son in the White House and was offered the Lincoln bedroom, she said, “You tell Harry if he tries to put me in Lincoln’s bed, I’ll sleep on the floor.”⁸ Truman’s initial attitudes on race mirrored those of his parents and grandparents. Perhaps nowhere else is this more evident than in a letter he wrote to Bess Wallace in 1911: “I am strongly of the opinion that negros ought to be in Africa, yellow men in Asia[,] and white men in Europe and America.”⁹ Shocking as these comments are, however, they reflect the social and political mores of Independence, Missouri. Despite his familial and regional background, Truman took steps that were, at the time, notable toward securing civil rights for African Americans, particularly in the border-state of Missouri.¹⁰ As a U.S. senator, Truman supported a progressive civil rights agenda in the Senate, including anti-lynching legislation, discrimination in the armed forces, and outlawing the poll tax.¹¹

When Truman assumed the presidency following FDR’s sudden death in April 1945, he inherited FDR’s less than stellar record on civil rights. Throughout the Roosevelt Administration,

it was First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt who championed the issue of civil rights and became the moral conscience of the nation, meeting often with black political leaders and urging her husband to support anti-lynching legislation in the U.S. Congress (something that FDR would never agree to do). The NAACP first found an ally in Truman in September 1946 when, after briefing the president on the brutal beatings and lynchings of African Americans in the South (including U.S. service members returning from World War II), the president decided to create the President's Commission on Civil Rights (PCCR) through executive order.¹² This action was the first of many important steps the president took to assume federal responsibility for the issue of civil rights in the United States.¹³ And although black political leaders and the NAACP were thrilled to finally have an ally in the White House, southern Democrats were furious. After Truman's special message to Congress in February 1948 outlining comprehensive civil rights reform, a U.S. Congressman from Georgia said his state had been "kicked in the teeth" by the president. Rep. William M. Colmer, a Congressman from Mississippi, stated: "Not since the first gun was fired on Fort Sumter, resulting as it did in the greatest fratricidal strife in the history of the world, has any message of any President of these glorious United States . . . resulted in the driving of a schism in the ranks of our people, as did President Truman's so-called civil rights message." Another Congressman from Mississippi, Rep. John Bell Williams, agreed, stating that the president "has . . . run a political dagger into our backs and now he is trying to drink our blood."¹⁴

But Truman was resolute, believing that he had a moral duty to ensure that all citizens enjoyed the rights laid out in the U.S. Constitution. When Democratic leaders asked him to back down on his civil rights agenda, the president replied: "My forebears were Confederates. . . . Every factor and influence in my background—and in my wife's for that matter—would foster the personal belief that you are right. But my stomach turned over when I learned that Negro soldiers, just back from overseas, were being dumped out of Army trucks and beaten. Whatever my inclinations as a native of Missouri might have been, as President I know this is bad. I shall fight to end evils like this."¹⁵ In another letter to a southern friend, Truman referenced the beating and blinding of Sergeant Isaac Woodward by local authorities as evidence that "something is radically wrong with the system. I can't approve of such goings on and I shall never approve of it, as long as I am here . . . I am going to try to remedy it and if that ends up in my failure to be reelected, that failure will be in a good cause."¹⁶ Truman saw the U.S. Constitution as a sacred document, and believed it was his job as President to ensure that the rights of citizenship extended to every U.S. citizen, regardless of their race. Truman's allegiance to these founding documents and the nation transcended any sectional identity. He considered himself a President of *all* the United States, and took decisive steps to extend civil rights to "all Americans"—a phrase that Truman would emphasize over and over again in his address to the NAACP on June 29, 1947, from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial (2).

When NAACP executive secretary Walter White asked the president to keynote the closing session of the organization's thirty-eighth annual conference, both men undoubtedly recognized the political risk. In his address, Truman would become the first president to address the organization in person since its founding in 1909 and, more importantly, the "first modern president to make an open and public commitment to civil rights."¹⁷ In a meeting with Truman on April 9, 1947, White reminded the president "how acts of discrimination against minorities were being used abroad to discredit the United States and convince the people of the world

that Americans were incurably addicted to bigotry.” Accordingly, White urged Truman to issue “forthright and unequivocal statement . . . to let the people of the world know that . . . we were constantly at work to narrow the margin between our protestations of freedom and our practice of them.”¹⁸ According to White’s autobiography, Truman told White to send him a list of the items he thought the president should emphasize in his speech. “We both laughed,” recalled White, “as I told him that if he included even one half of the things I thought he ought to say, the Southern Democrats would probably want to run him out of the country.”¹⁹

Truman’s address to the NAACP would ruffle feathers not just because of what he said, but also because of where he would speak—from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. Although contemporary audiences associate the site with the Civil Rights Movement, this was by no means the original intent. In 1912, the Lincoln Memorial Commission (LMC) designed a monument that would honor Abraham Lincoln as the “Savior of the Union”—not the “Great Emancipator.” Because the “early twentieth century celebrated the economic and political reunion of North and South,” writes historian Scott Sandage, “Lincoln’s ties to black freedom waned as politicians and scholars sculpted him into a ‘pro-Southern conservative’ honored on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line.”²⁰ The LMC was explicit about its intent to memorialize Lincoln as “Savior of the Union,” designing a Greek Doric temple featuring thirty-six columns, one for every state in the Union at the time of Lincoln’s death, and forty-eight memorial festoons representing the number of states in 1922. The text inscribed above Lincoln’s statue also underscored the slain president’s status in national memory: “IN THIS TEMPLE / AS IN THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE / FOR WHOM HE SAVED THE UNION / THE MEMORY OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN / IS ENSHRINED FOREVER.” The author of these words, Royal Cortissoz, explained their significance to architect Henry Bacon, writing, “The memorial must make a common ground for the meeting of the north and the south. By emphasizing his saving the union you need to appeal to both sections. By saying nothing about slavery you avoid the rubbing of old sores.”²¹ When President Warren G. Harding dedicated the Memorial in 1922, he was explicit about rejecting Lincoln’s status as the “Great Emancipator”: “The supreme chapter in history is not emancipation. The simple truth is that Lincoln, recognizing an established order, would have compromised with slavery that existed if he could have halted its extension. . . . Emancipation was a means to a great end—maintained union and nationality.”²² Moreover, Harding reminded his audience that Lincoln saw “deliberate public opinion as the supreme power of civilization” and offered this “tonic” to those impatient with the state of race relations in the United States: “Deliberate public opinion never fails.”²³ To underscore the point, the U.S. Park Service segregated seating arrangements at the dedication ceremony, making only a small number of seats available to “distinguished Colored ticket holders” in a “Jim Crow section of seats” at the very back.²⁴

But when Truman spoke from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial twenty-five years later, he invoked an altogether different interpretation of the slain president’s status in national memory and, more specifically, the symbolism of this particular place in U.S. national memory. In the spring of 1939, after the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) refused to let world-renowned singer Marian Anderson perform at Constitution Hall because she was black, the NAACP suggested the idea of an outdoor concert instead. In a personal letter to Anderson, executive secretary Walter White recommended the Lincoln Memorial “because of the peculiar appropriateness of that place under the present circumstances.”²⁵ First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt,

who had resigned her DAR membership to protest the organization's decision, worked behind the scenes to lobby for Anderson's use of this symbolic site, and after Harold Ickes, the Secretary of the Interior and the former president of the Chicago branch of the NAACP, got permission from President Roosevelt for this plan, he announced on March 30 that Marian Anderson would sing at the Lincoln Memorial ten days later.²⁶ Anderson's performance marked the first time an artist had ever sung at the national shrine.²⁷ The Interior Department predicted that a crowd of 50,000 would hear Anderson sing on Easter Sunday; after the event, the U.S. Capitol Park Police put the number at 75,000. To those who could not attend the event in person, the concert was broadcast live over radio networks.²⁸ Secretary Ickes introduced Marian Anderson to the crowd himself. He also took the opportunity to make a public statement on race relations in the United States, stating that "it is as appropriate as it is fortunate that today we stand reverently and humbly at the base of this memorial to the Great Emancipator while glorious tribute is rendered to his memory by a daughter of the race from which he struck the chains of slavery."²⁹ Through this Easter Sunday concert, Marian Anderson and the NAACP shifted the site's symbolic status from a national shrine to the "Savior of the Union" to a site for civil rights activism. And it was this new meaning that Truman would reaffirm when he spoke at the closing session of the NAACP's thirty-eighth annual conference on June 29, 1947. As Edward S. Casey observes, certain places provide "an active material inducement [that draws out] the appropriate memories in that location."³⁰ In this instance, Truman's presence in this place simultaneously rejected one memory—Harding's 1922 dedication—even as it affirmed the other—Marian Anderson's 1939 concert.

Both the NAACP and the Truman administration recognized the symbolic linkages between Truman's June 29, 1947 address and the rhetorical resonances of this particular location. An early draft of the Sunday afternoon program included ten minutes of singing by none other than Marian Anderson to open the event. In their formal press release announcing Truman's participation, the NAACP noted: "It is expected that an audience as large as that which heard Marion [sic] Anderson at the historic 1939 Easter Sunday concert, will again fill the Lincoln Memorial."³¹ Walter White underscored the domestic and international implications of the event, stating that the NAACP would "meet in the fitting shadow of the Abraham Lincoln monument to rededicate all of its resources and energies to the people of all nations who fought and are still fighting to secure the rights of all men."³² The White House also saw this occasion as an opportunity for Truman to appropriate Lincoln's memory in the current Cold War context. In a June 16, 1947 memo, White House administrative assistant David K. Niles noted that the introduction of Truman's speech should reference the "significance of meeting on the grounds of Lincoln memorial. 'He died to make men free.' His problem: One Nation. Our problem: One world. The problem of freedom in the modern world; our goal, to maintain the greatest possible freedom for the individual." Although Niles' memorandum prioritized U.S. foreign policy over the current state of race relations at home and recommended that Truman only spend "one minute" on the issue of civil rights, the president did not follow this advice.³³ In fact, a hastily scribbled note in the files suggests that Truman had a mixed response to Niles' memo: "some good; some not so good."³⁴ According to White House aide and speechwriter George Elsey, it was Robert Carr, the director of the PCCR, that wrote the first full draft of the speech because Carr knew "more about what need[ed] to be done and what need[ed] to be said" than anyone else.³⁵

As part of a meticulously planned public relations campaign, President Truman's speech to the NAACP would follow speeches by Republican Senator Wayne Morse of Oregon, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, and an introduction of the president by Walter White. As White outlined in a memo to David K. Niles, the program would run "56 minutes with an allowance of 4 minutes for applause, etc. By adhering strictly to this schedule it is our hope that we shall be able to get the entire one-hour program broadcast by all of the networks."³⁶ Truman's address would be broadcast on the four major radio networks (CBS, NBC, ABC, and Mutual), and the U.S. Department of State made arrangements to send the program by short wave radio around the globe.³⁷ The NAACP also ensured that the speech would be filmed for newsreel distribution around the country.³⁸ The NAACP's plans to circulate live coverage and visuals of the event underscore the importance not just of Truman's physical presence at the event, but the symbolic significance of where the event would be situated. When Truman delivered the keynote address to the NAACP's thirty-eighth annual conference, his physical presence before this audience in this particular location at this historical moment was profoundly rhetorical. Before he ever opened his mouth, the fact that this president, the grandson of slave owners, dared to challenge the institutionalized *doxa* of white supremacy and Jim Crow while standing in the literal and symbolic shadow of Abraham Lincoln spoke volumes.³⁹

Harry S. Truman's Address to the NAACP: June 29, 1947

The president began his Address to the NAACP by acknowledging the other guests on the platform, particularly NAACP chairman Walter White, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, Senator Morse, and other "distinguished guests" (1). He then expressed his pleasure in attending this event, stating: "I am happy to be present at the closing session of the 38th Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The occasion of meeting with you here at the Lincoln Memorial affords me the opportunity to congratulate the association upon its effective work for the improvement of our democratic processes" (1). In these opening remarks, Truman hinted at what made this moment so extraordinary. As the first president to address the NAACP in person, Truman's presence before this particular audience underscored his support for the organization's civil rights agenda. The *New York Amsterdam News* later observed, "[n]o occasion in the affairs of the United States is of more importance than when and where the president is the speaker," and "by appearing in person and making forthright declarations on the burning question of race prejudice . . . [Truman] made a notable contribution to the fight for democracy and decency in this country."⁴⁰ The rhetorical significance of Truman's attendance was compounded by his physical location "here at the Lincoln Memorial" (1). By speaking to this audience in this place, Truman suggested that he would align himself not just with the NAACP, but also with the organization's strategic deployment of this national shrine. When Truman underscored the fact that he was "here" to reaffirm freedom and equality for "all Americans," this deictic reference helped his audience—those assembled on the National Mall and those listening to the radio—to envision the scene (1, 3).

The president then declared the overall purpose for this address: "I should like to talk to you briefly about civil rights and human freedom" (2). In language very similar to the way President Roosevelt would tell his audience that he wanted to converse with them at the

beginning of his “Fireside Chats,” Truman described his address as an opportunity to “talk” with the nation about the ideals and values that defined the country and, by extension, the principles of democracy. Employing the presidential “I,” Truman reinforced his executive authority to define the bounds of “civil rights and human freedom” and characterize this particular moment in U.S. history. “It is my deep conviction that we have reached a turning point in the long history of our country’s efforts to guarantee freedom and equality to all our citizens” (2). Notice how Truman’s use of pronouns in this passage quickly assigned agency to the rest of the audience. Speaking both as President of the United States and as a fellow citizen, Truman transferred his own view (“my deep conviction”) of civil rights to the rest of his audience when he argued that “we have reached a turning point” within “the long history of our country’s efforts to guarantee freedom and equality to all our citizens.” In the span of one sentence, Truman shifted the temporal view of race relations in the United States from one of gradual progress (“long history”) to a definitive moment requiring an immediate response (“turning point”). And yet, it was precisely because 1947 was situated within this “long history”—a history that had taken far too long, Truman suggested—that this particular moment could now be understood as the time for political action. But Truman’s use of “turning point” had more than temporal implications. The phrase also implies deliberate bodily movement, a shift in direction in a particular place, turning away from something and moving toward something else. In this instance, Truman argued that this moment required the nation to reject the idea that racial progress would happen over time (a view that Harding had advocated at the Lincoln Memorial’s dedication in 1922) and instead take specific steps to “guarantee freedom and equality to all our citizens” (2).

Having defined this moment as a critical juncture in U.S. race relations, the president gestured toward “[r]ecent events in the United States and abroad [that] have made us realize that it is more important today than ever before to insure that all Americans enjoy these rights” (2). In this sentence, Truman used temporal and spatial metaphors to describe the current domestic and international situation. “Recent events”—temporally proximate and also physically near—brought about this change in perspective: “today” it was more important than “ever before” to extend “these rights”—the “freedom and equality” Truman had mentioned in the previous sentence—to “all Americans.” Although “today” referred to June 29, 1947 (a distinct moment within the nation’s history), “today” now also suggested a larger temporal frame for this moment in time, an occasion requiring communal reflection and deliberate action. These “recent events” also had material implications for the audience’s daily existence “in the United States” and for the nation’s broader relationship with the rest of the world (“abroad”). Truman did not elaborate the specifics of these recent events, but instead invited his audience to supply their own evidence. Although the “recent events in the United States” of mob violence, police brutality, and lynching in the United States would have been all too familiar to the African American members of Truman’s audience, they also were widely reported throughout the nation and around the world as evidence that the United States did not adhere to the democratic ideals it espoused. These “recent events” also applied to international developments in the post-World War II world, most notably the failing economies in Greece and Turkey. Recall that just three months earlier, in his “Truman Doctrine” pronouncement of March 12, 1947, the president had pledged that the United States would provide military and economic aid to help European democracies withstand the tide of Soviet

communism. Thus, in pointing his audience toward the “recent events” at home and abroad, Truman gestured toward his later argument that the nation should become a beacon of democratic values to the rest of the world.

By the time Truman reached the two-minute mark of his address, he had underscored the significance of this particular occasion and his presidential presence in place, defined the urgency of this particular moment, and linked the United States’ racial progress to a larger Cold War foreign policy narrative. After laying this contextual groundwork for his immediate and extended audience, the president delivered what was perhaps the most striking line of his address—one that Truman added himself during the speechwriting process.⁴¹ In an extension of the previous sentence (“...it is more important today than ever before to insure that all Americans enjoy these rights”), Truman specified who was included in the category of “all Americans”: “When I say all Americans[,] I mean all Americans” (3).⁴² Truman’s delivery of this particular line was forceful and determined, and the president put particular emphasis on the second half of the sentence: “I mean all Americans.” To an audience accustomed to identifying vocal cadences over the radio, this shift would have been quite obvious. The implicit argument here was that although any U.S. citizen could identify as an “American,” this title offered nothing but an empty signifier to non-whites. For millions of black Americans, many of whom had fought for their country during World War II, the rights and privileges guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution were non-existent. Significant as well is how Truman’s use of the presidential “I” lent executive authority to his statement. Where his predecessor refused to support congressional anti-lynching legislation because he feared losing the support of Southern Democrats, Truman employed his presidential *ethos* to underscore the dichotomy between what the government proclaimed in principle and what it actually meant. The qualifier “all” suggested more than total inclusion; it also subtly linked Truman’s declaration with the emancipatory connotations of “all”—a phrase Lincoln used to describe the reach of his Emancipation Proclamation that “all persons held as slaves . . . shall be . . . forever free.”⁴³

After defining who could claim the title of “American,” Truman suggested that the “civil rights laws written in the early years of our Republic,” although precious, were not enough (4). These original laws were designed “to protect the citizen against any possible tyrannical act by the new government in this country,” the president explained (4). “But we cannot be content with a civil liberties program which emphasizes only the need of protection against the possibility of tyranny by the Government. We cannot stop there” (5). Here Truman continued his description of U.S. history as a chronological timeline interrupted by the urgency of this particular moment. The “civil rights laws” of the past were just that—legislative initiatives developed in response to previous historical exigencies but incapable of solving the pressing needs of the present. If the nation continued to rely on these relics of the past, any historical progress would “stop”—a spatial and temporal metaphor that implied stagnation or even backward momentum. Instead, Truman argued that the United States “must keep moving forward, with new concepts of civil rights to safeguard our heritage. The extension of civil rights today means, not protection of the people against the Government, but protection of the people by the Government” (6). It was only through active, thoughtful, deliberate action that the nation would “safeguard our heritage” and keep the promise of democracy alive “today” (6). Truman emphasized that “[w]e”—both he and the rest of his audience—“must make the Federal Government a friendly, vigilant defender of the rights and equalities of all Americans.

And again I mean all Americans” (7). Truman’s implicit argument here was that many government officials, particularly those in the south, were the primary cause of racial violence and disenfranchisement. The president directly challenged the status quo of Jim Crow and state’s rights, arguing that securing civil rights for “all Americans” necessitated a federal response to those who threatened the rights of “all Americans”—even if that meant government officials themselves.

Truman continued to underscore the urgency of this moment in U.S. history and stated in no uncertain terms that racial discrimination was inexcusable.

Our immediate task is to remove the last remnants of the barriers which stand between millions of our citizens and their birthright. There is no justifiable reason for discrimination because of ancestry, or religion, or race, or color. We must not tolerate such limitations on the freedom of any of our people and on their enjoyment of basic rights which every citizen in a truly democratic society must possess (9-10).

In this passage, Truman used spatial and temporal metaphors to characterize the issue of racial discrimination in the United States. Having already established that previous civil rights laws were not enough to ensure racial justice for “all Americans,” the president argued that today’s “immediate task”—one shared by all U.S. citizens—was to “remove” the “barriers” and “limitations” that stood between “millions of our citizens and their birthright.” In an earlier draft, this last sentence read “millions of our citizens and their heritage.” But in a draft edited the day before Truman’s address to the NAACP, an unidentified individual replaced “heritage” with “birthright,” a switch that further underscored Truman’s claim that simply relying on the nation’s supposed historical commitment to extending democratic liberties was not enough.⁴⁴ Moreover, Truman’s usage of “barriers” and “limitations” offered a mental picture of a concrete roadblock preventing one from moving forward to their intended destination. This metaphor suggested that the current state of civil rights in the United States was not only a roadblock for African American citizens, but for the entire nation. If millions of U.S. citizens could not access their constitutionally-guaranteed rights, how could the rest of the nation expect to achieve theirs?

It is also important to note Truman’s frequent usage of “our” in this passage. This inclusive collective pronoun suggested that the task of extending basic civil rights to racial minorities belonged to the entire nation, not just the president; it was a moral responsibility to be shared by all. At the same time, “our” described the individuals who currently did not experience the “basic rights which every citizen in a truly democratic society must possess.” Thus, “our citizens” and “our people” worked to describe blacks and other racial minorities as full-fledged citizens who were already part of the nation but were being treated as outsiders. If these individuals were living and working as fellow members of the nation, why were they not treated as such? In the final sentence of this particular passage, Truman’s larger Cold War foreign policy argument came to the forefront; if “[w]e” tolerated discrimination against “any of our people,” how could the United States claim that it was the paramount example of “a truly democratic society”?

But Truman went beyond generalities and specified what rights “all Americans” should enjoy. “Every man should have the right to a decent home, the right to an education, the right to adequate medical care, the right to a worthwhile job, the right to an equal share in making the public decisions through the ballot, and the fight to a fair trial in a fair court” (11). It is

notable that the president described these concrete rights for equal housing, access to education and medical care, employment, universal suffrage, and the right to a fair trial as fundamental to U.S. citizenship, particularly because racial discrimination remained rampant in all of these areas in 1947 (and even today in 2017). The Truman Administration archival files even betray a certain level of discomfort with this statement during the speechwriting process. In a “3rd Draft” of the speech contained in the files of George Elsey, an unidentified author wrote in the margin of this particular passage, “These are more than civil rights.”⁴⁵ And yet, Truman was insistent that the federal government take action to ensure that “these rights—on equal terms—are enjoyed by every citizen. To these principles I pledge my full and continued support” (12-13).

Although Truman insisted that these rights should be “enjoyed by every citizen,” he directly acknowledged this was not the case for African Americans. “Many of our people still suffer the indignity of insult, the harrowing fear of intimidation, and, I regret to say, the threat of physical injury and mob violence. Prejudice and intolerance in which these evils are rooted still exist” (14). It is rhetorically significant that Truman characterized what many in the South considered social norms as inherently “evil.” As President of the United States, Truman’s description of the current state of civil rights in explicitly moral terms had long-lasting implications. Where previous U.S. presidents (most notably FDR) had refused to take a stand against anti-lynching legislation and other civil rights initiatives, Truman called these actions what they were—morally repugnant and evil. Worse yet, the president continued, “[t]he conscience of our Nation, and the legal machinery which enforces it,” had “not yet secured to each citizen full freedom from fear” (14). Not only did African Americans experience the threat of physical violence and intimidation on a daily basis; the country’s “legal machinery” stood idly by as these evils were perpetuated. Additionally, Truman’s final description of “freedom from fear” was an obvious reference to FDR’s 1941 State of the Union Address, one that the audience would be well aware of not just because of the historical proximity between 1941 and 1947, but also because of Norman Rockwell’s iconic paintings depicting FDR’s “Four Freedoms.” These four images were printed on the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post* in February and March of 1943, circulated widely as war bond posters, and came to represent basic human rights enjoyed by all citizens.⁴⁶ Thus, when Truman argued that state and local governments had denied millions of citizens “full freedom from fear,” he acknowledged that freedoms that the U.S. had promised to help secure for the entire world had yet to be assured for black U.S. citizens.

Characterizing the situation in moral terms, Truman appealed to the nation’s conscience to emphasize the urgency of the moment. “We cannot wait another decade or another generation to remedy these evils. We must work, as never before, to cure them now” (15). This was a direct attack on Southern Democrats who argued that racial prejudice was a lingering symptom of the Civil War, one that would require time and gradual progress. Having already enumerated specific injustices faced by African American citizens, the president then extended the urgency beyond national borders and linked civil rights progress in the United States to his Cold War foreign policy:

The aftermath of war and the desire to keep faith with our Nation’s historic principles make the need a pressing one. The support of desperate populations of battle-ravaged countries must be won for the free way of life. We must have them as allies in our

continuing struggle for the peaceful solution of the world's problems. Freedom is not an easy lesson to teach, nor an easy cause to sell, to peoples beset by every kind of privation. They may surrender to the false security offered so temptingly by totalitarian regimes unless we can prove the superiority of democracy (15-16).

The moral view of domestic race relations was now a tactical move within Truman's Cold War foreign policy, one that elevated the United States to a position of moral and political authority on this metaphorical chessboard. The "desperate populations of battle-ravaged countries" looked to the United States for leadership to solve "the world's problems." If the United States failed to prove the "superiority of democracy" to "peoples beset by every kind of privation," the nation would fall short of continuing "our Nation's historic principles." How was the United States to convince the rest of the world that democracy was the best choice in this post-war world?

The answer, argued Truman, was to deal directly with the issue of civil rights at home. The most persuasive case for U.S. democracy, Truman argued, was to show the rest of the world "practical evidence that we have been able to put our own house in order" (17). Describing the nation as a house evoked what Merrill D. Peterson has called "one of the most famous utterances in American history," namely, Lincoln's warning that "[a] house divided against itself cannot stand."⁴⁷ Although this phrase was originally from the New Testament, Lincoln used it to compare the United States to a house divided between North and South, half slave and half free.⁴⁸ When the president compared the nation's current state as a house in need of (re)order, he invoked not only the memory of Abraham Lincoln, but also used the reference to specify the "version" of Lincoln he wished to summon. To an audience assembled at the base of a national shrine to the slain president, Truman insisted that a national commitment to democratic principles would transcend sectional divisions or racial prejudice so that the rest of the world could see firsthand the merits of democracy.

To those who may have missed his indirect reference to Lincoln or who argued that Lincoln was primarily concerned with unification and would have ceded to popular opinion on the question of slavery, Truman was explicit: "[W]e can no longer afford the luxury of a leisurely attack upon prejudice and discrimination. There is much that State and local governments can do in providing positive safeguards for civil rights. But we cannot, any longer, await the growth of a will to action in the slowest State or the most backward community. Our National Government must show the way" (18). This was a direct attack on the South. Although the president stated that local governments were capable of taking steps to eradicate racial prejudice, he did not say they actually acted on this ability. In fact, one way to read Truman's statement is to contrast what "State and local governments can do" with what "we," the president and the rest of the U.S. public, "cannot" do: wait for these regional entities to act. Because local governments refused to exercise their state sovereignty to take action against racial violence, the nation could not afford to wait. Truman's use of "any longer"—a phrase he inserted himself during the speechwriting process—further underscored the urgency of the moment.⁴⁹ In other words, the nation had waited, and black citizens had been beaten, tortured, and murdered as a result. Now, Truman declared, it was the federal government's responsibility to lead the nation forward, regardless of states and/or communities who refused to enact change.

Truman acknowledged that this would be a "difficult and complex undertaking," one

that would require executive action and federal oversight (19). Noting that the government would require “better tools to do the job,” Truman then employed the presidential “I” to establish his executive authority in providing these tools (19). One of the first steps in this process was the President’s Commission on Civil Rights: “I appointed an Advisory Committee on Civil Rights last December. Its members, fifteen distinguished private citizens, have been surveying our civil rights difficulties and needs for several months. I am confident that the product of their work will be a sensible and vigorous program for action by all of us” (19). Notice the various pronouns operating in these three sentences and how they assign certain duties to the audience. First, Truman used “I” to describe the actions he took as president and the expectations he had for the PCCR’s report. He then described the committee members as “distinguished private citizens,” emphasizing that this survey of “our civil rights difficulties”—difficulties the entire nation shared and suffered from—was a joint effort of the federal government and everyday citizens. Truman then shifted back to his presidential “I” to express his confidence that the committee’s work would provide “a sensible and vigorous program for action by all of us.” In other words, he used his rhetorical authority as president to lend credibility to the committee’s report—even before it was issued—and remind his audience that these findings would require all citizens, not just government officials or elected politicians, to act. The president also advocated that the country should “advance civil rights wherever it lies within our power,” urging the U.S. Congress to extend “basic civil rights to the people of [U.S. territories] Guam and American Samoa,” a step that Truman predicted would provide further “evidence to the rest of the world of our confidence in the ability of all men to build free institutions” (20).

As he moved toward the conclusion of his address, the president returned to his use of spatial and temporal metaphors in order to underscore the urgency of the present moment. To do this, he first acknowledged that “[t]he way ahead is not easy,” a phrase that suggested forward movement from a particular spatio-temporal from one point and toward another (21). To get there, Truman said, “[w]e shall need all the wisdom, imagination and courage we can muster” (21). And yet, this decisive action was not optional. “We must and shall guarantee the civil rights of all our citizens,” the president continued. “Never before has the need been so urgent for skillful and vigorous action to bring us closer to our ideal. We can reach our goal” (21-22). Depicting this moment as a singularly opportune one, Truman contrasted June 29, 1947, with earlier historical markers, arguing “[n]ever before” had the need for deliberate federal action been greater. These steps, although difficult, would push the nation forward toward “our ideal” of ensuring that the rights guaranteed in the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and the Bill of Rights were accessible to “all Americans.” Acknowledging that the “way ahead” toward racial justice would not be easy, Truman argued, “we can reach that goal.”

These spatial and temporal metaphors described the nation’s gradual movement toward ensuring freedom and equality for “all Americans” even as they identified an attainable goal—one that “we,” Truman and the rest of his audience, would reach together. To inspire this “way ahead,” the president asked his audience to look backward in time. “When past difficulties faced our Nation, we met the challenge with inspiring charters of human rights—the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the Emancipation Proclamation” (22). The majority of Truman’s audience would have immediately recognized the

first three documents as sacred texts of U.S. democracy. What, however, is to be made of the fourth document on the list—the Emancipation Proclamation, a text that Lincoln authored but appeared nowhere on the national shrine behind him?

Truman's inclusion of this particular document achieved at least four rhetorical purposes. First, it subtly rejected Harding's assessment in 1922 that "the supreme chapter in history is not emancipation" and instead reaffirmed the NAACP's strategic deployment of the Lincoln Memorial as a site for civil rights activism.⁵⁰ Second, it suggested that the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights were not simply foundational texts but "charters of human rights"—rights that extended to "all Americans" (22, 3). Third, when Truman added the Emancipation Proclamation to this list, he extended the reach of Lincoln's initial proclamation from a relatively small geographical region to the entire nation and the global stage—a move that reinforced Lincoln's status as the Great Emancipator even as it expanded the connotations of "all" to "all classes and conditions of mankind" (24). Finally, it propelled the audience toward a new international vision of human rights. In identifying the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a modern-day appropriation of these earlier documents, Truman asserted that this document would be "a great landmark in man's long search for freedom since its members consist of such distinguished citizens of the world as Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt" (22). The president's audience would have heard Mrs. Roosevelt speak just moments before about her work on this initiative. Thus, when Truman pointed his audience to Mrs. Roosevelt's physical presence on the dais next to him, he linked his rhetorical authority to this outspoken proponent of civil rights.

Connecting the "inspired charters" produced by "past difficulties" with the present moment, Truman held up these sacred texts as a metaphorical North Star. "With these noble charters to guide us, and with faith in our hearts, we shall make our land a happier home for our people, a symbol of hope for all men, and a rock of security in a troubled world" (23). Here Truman extended his argument for civil rights from the local to the global. If the nation put "our own house in order," it would then be able to become a "happier home" for all its citizens, regardless of race. "Home" suggested not only comfort, but also described a place where one could be at ease and at rest—a dwelling place. And if the United States offered a safe harbor for "all Americans," the nation could then provide an example to other nations seeking a democratic way of life. These spatial and relational images elevated the nation to the global stage as "a symbol of hope" and "a rock of security" in a "troubled world" threatened by Soviet communism.

In the final moments of his speech, Truman concluded by linking Abraham Lincoln's memory and the symbolic status of this particular location when he confidently asserted, "Abraham Lincoln understood so well the ideal which you and I seek today" (24). To Truman's immediate audience, it would have been impossible to listen to these words and not also see the current president's body dwarfed by the giant statue of the Great Emancipator behind him. Even to those assembled several blocks (or miles) down the National Mall or those listening via radio, it would have been difficult to forget the symbolic significance of Truman's physical location. Thus, when Truman concluded his speech with a quote from Lincoln himself, it was as if the martyred sixteenth president was speaking instead of Truman. Two presidential bodies—one living, the other carved in stone—proclaimed to the nation and the world that the United States had a moral duty to extend freedom and democracy not just to its own citizens but to all

people.

“As this conference closes,” Truman continued, “we would do well to keep in mind his words, when he said, “if it shall please the Divine Being who determines the destinies of nations, we shall remain a united people, and we will, humbly seeking the Divine Guidance, make their prolonged national existence a source of new benefits to themselves and their successors, and to all classes and conditions of mankind” (24).⁵¹ In this little-remembered passage from a speech to a small group of Lutheran pastors in 1862, Lincoln argued that the nation would best express its unity by extending “new benefits” to “all classes and conditions of mankind.” At first glance, this particular passage seems like a conciliatory way to conclude remarks that Truman knew would, at the very least, make Northern politicians nervous and Southern Democrats angry. Indeed, here Lincoln stressed his desire that the nation would “remain a united people,” a statement that reflected the “Savior of the Union” image Southern Democrats cherished. However, the larger context of Lincoln’s words is important and reveals yet again how Truman used this particular occasion not just to advance his civil rights agenda but also articulate his Cold War foreign policy.

Prior to the passage that Truman quoted, Lincoln thanked his guests for “their assurances of the sympathy and support . . . in an important crisis which involves, in my judgment, not only the civil and religious liberties of our own dear land, but in a large degree the civil and religious liberties of mankind in many countries and through many ages.” Here Lincoln argued that the Civil War directly affected “not only the civil and religious liberties” within the United States, but also the rights and liberties of citizens in other countries around the world. This was the same argument Truman would make eighty-five years later. Lincoln continued, “You well know, gentlemen, and the world knows, how reluctantly I accepted this issue of battle forced upon me, on my advent to this place, by the internal enemies of this country.” Although Lincoln referred specifically to the sectional divide between the North and the South, and the resulting Civil War, Truman would express similar sentiments about his unexpected ascendance to the presidency and the actions he took to combat racial prejudice and lynch law during his tenure as chief executive. Indeed, even the day before he delivered this address to the NAACP, Truman wrote to his sister, Mary Jane, that he wished he “didn’t have to make it . . . Mamma won’t like what I say because I wind up quoting old Abe. But I believe what I say and I’m hopeful we may implement it.”⁵² In many ways, Truman was quite reluctant to address these civil rights issues because of his personal history and his own inexcusable racial prejudice. And yet, Truman advocated for civil rights because of his allegiance to the Union transcended any sectional affiliation. As president, Truman believed it was his job to ensure that all citizens, regardless of race or religion, enjoyed the liberties guaranteed to them in the U.S. Constitution. Anything less would be a direct violation of his oath of office.

Thus, when Truman told his audience that they would do well to “keep in mind [Lincoln’s] words,” he was not merely reminding his audience that the slain president wanted to unify the country, although he did. Instead, Truman was suggesting that the task the U.S. public faced in 1947, although difficult and even uncomfortable, was one that could redeem the nation’s past sins of slavery and racial injustice. Truman channeled Lincoln’s hope for a “united people,” calling his audience to transcend sectional differences between North and South (as he had) and rededicate themselves to the democratic values first set forth in the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and even the Emancipation

Proclamation. Relying on Lincoln's argument as evidence for his own, Truman suggested that the nation's "prolonged national existence" in a postwar world required a specific response: extending civil rights and human freedom at home and abroad. Yet again, Truman invoked the emancipatory connotations of "all," yet pushed them even further. Not only did "all Americans" deserve the rights laid out in the nation's "inspiring charters of human rights," but these liberties should be extended to "all classes and conditions of mankind" around the globe. Concluding his speech with this quote from the nation's sixteenth president, Truman reaffirmed Lincoln's symbolic status as the "Great Emancipator" even as Truman directed his audience to the visual and material elements of the speech situation to support his argument for extending civil rights to "all Americans"—and the rest of the world.

The Public Response

The public response to Truman's speech was immediate, and the varied reactions to his address reveal not only the symbolic significance of Truman's decision to speak at the Lincoln Memorial but also a nation sharply divided over the issue of race. In this final section, I consider responses in three categories: 1) personal reflections from individuals who attended the event and/or were affiliated with the NAACP or the PCCR; 2) mediated coverage of the event; and 3) letters U.S. citizens wrote to Truman following his speech found at the Truman Library archives.

Personal Reflections

In their July 11, 1947, press release following the event, the NAACP declared that Truman's speech at the Lincoln Memorial "would produce far reaching effects of a beneficial nature in domestic race relations as well as some in sections of international relations. The president's speech, which closed the 38th Annual Conference of the NAACP, was broadcast over four major networks and by short wave to every section of the globe where American influence was being maintained."⁵³ In a private letter to the president dated July 9, Walter White told Truman that the organization had "been swamped with telegrams, letters, telephone calls and other expressions of enthusiastic approval of the speech which you made at [the] Lincoln Memorial on June 29th and of the occasion generally. As I told you then, it was the most forthright pronouncement any American president has yet made on this issue."⁵⁴ In his autobiographical account published just a year later, White compared Truman's speech to Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Although he "did not believe that Truman's speech possessed the literary quality of Lincoln's speech," White observed that "in some respects it had been a more courageous one in its specific condemnation of evils based upon race prejudice which had too long disgraced America, and its call for immediate action against them." According to White's account, when Truman returned to his seat he asked what the NAACP executive secretary thought of the speech. "When I told him how excellent I believed it to be," White recalled, "he assured me, 'I said what I did because I mean every word of it—and I'm going to prove that I do mean it.'"⁵⁵

Channing Tobias, a prominent black leader and one of the fourteen members of the PCCR, also wrote to Truman to express his enthusiasm: "Never before in the history of our country has any president been quite as explicit as you were in challenging the nation to a single standard of citizenship for all Americans," he wrote. Tobias told Truman that he was "encouraged as I have never been before, to believe that this is an ideal possible of

achievement and I want you to know that your spirit and your spoken word have been the chief influence that has brought this outlook of optimism to the tenth of the nation with which I happen to be identified.”⁵⁶

Just three days after the speech, Eleanor Roosevelt made the event the subject of her “My Day” newspaper article, the widely-syndicated column that Mrs. Roosevelt wrote six days a week from 1935 to 1962.⁵⁷ Because millions of U.S. citizens read her daily column, the former First Lady’s emphasis on the place of the event further amplified Truman’s presidential presence there while reaffirming the Lincoln Memorial’s symbolic status in national life.

I looked out over the sea of faces below us and thought how significant this meeting before the Lincoln Memorial must be to most of the people there. Lincoln said that there should be no more slaves in our country, but he did not want to give people a freedom that meant nothing or that carried with it the bitterness of inferiority. Now, some 80 years later, we were gathered here to try really to achieve the ends which he envisioned but could not fully accomplish. President Truman spoke words for the Government, in the presence of his chief justice and his attorney general, which should give hope that tangible strides toward the fulfillment of Lincoln’s vision can now be taken. I was very proud that these words were being spoken. It made me feel that our country would be stronger because they were fearlessly spoken. The sun made the top of the Washington Monument glisten before us, and somehow it seemed as tho [sic] years of our history lay between the two monuments. And in my heart I said a prayer that this meeting might be the symbol that we really would lead the world in justice and brotherhood, and by so doing make it possible for peace to grow in men’s hearts and justice to exist between man and man.⁵⁸

What is particularly fascinating about Eleanor Roosevelt’s description is how she provided her readers with an eyewitness account to the event. Even if her audience missed the speech via radio broadcast or had not seen actual pictures of the event, the former First Lady’s column offered a clear description of where the event was, why this particular location was rhetorically significant, and how the president’s text interacted with and built upon the Lincoln Memorial’s status in U.S. political culture.

Mediated Coverage of Truman’s Address

Several prominent newspapers published photos of Truman’s speech at the Lincoln Memorial, including the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *New York Amsterdam News*, and the *Atlanta Daily World*.⁵⁹ Several newspapers also published the complete text of Truman’s address so the U.S. public could refer back to the speech themselves.⁶⁰ Others simply published portions of the address or included brief quotations in their analyses of the event. Many of these press reports referenced the location of Truman’s address, although some of these mentions may simply have been to locate the event in time and place. However, other newspapers commented explicitly on the symbolic significance of Truman’s rhetoric in place.

For example, *The Christian Science Monitor* noted the setting of the president’s address, writing, “Few are the Americans, we think, who will find fault with the ideals of human rights and freedom to which President Truman pledged himself the other day as he stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and addressed a great throng, with the Washington Monument and its mirrored reflection beyond forming a symbolic setting such as few cities of the world can provide.”⁶¹ An article in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* specifically noted the significance of the

location. “President Truman chose an excellent place and occasion for his assertion of the importance of ‘positive safeguards for civil rights.’ He spoke in the shadow of the marble memorial to his great predecessor, whose Emancipation Proclamation first gave the very first of civil rights—freedom—to many thousands of Americans.”⁶² *The Chicago Defender*, a prominent African American newspaper, was explicit about the significance of Truman’s placement:

“[Truman] stood in the shadow of that great liberator, Abraham Lincoln, at the Lincoln Memorial and delivered a second emancipation speech to the throngs who had come to hear him. He was flanked by diplomats from our sister nations and other internationally known dignitaries. Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt and Senator Wayne Morris [sic], Republican of Oregon, shared the platform and spotlight with Mr. Truman. Throughout the world, his liberation speech was carried by short wave and four major networks in America brought it to the ears of millions here at home.”⁶³

And the *Atlanta Daily World* suggested that the Lincoln Memorial offered a location for reaffirmation of national values, noting that Truman’s address, “broadcast over all major networks to the nation, was made from the grounds of Lincoln Memorial where thousands assembled for a spiritual re-dedication of America to the ideals and principals [sic] upon which the United States was founded.”⁶⁴

Other news reports focused on the rhetorical circulation of the president’s speech both in the United States and around the world. The *New York Amsterdam News* declared Truman’s address “one of the most far-reaching addresses against race prejudice ever propounded by a President of these United States. . . . which was broadcast over the four major radio networks, and short-waved by the State Department to foreign countries—to an estimated unseen audience of nearly fifty million.”⁶⁵ The *Atlanta Daily World* reported that, “[a]ccording to reliable observers, the foreign press devoted a good deal of editorial space to the Chief Executive’s discussion of civil rights. It was considered significant that the short-wave transmission of Mr. Truman’s speech was made through direct State Department request.” Moreover, the article noted, the “fact that many Southern newspapers devoted part of their editorial pages to the speech was considered one of the more immediate benefits.”⁶⁶ The *New York Amsterdam News* emphasized the various ways Truman’s speech reached the U.S. public, writing that “[n]o one who heard his speech at the Lincoln Memorial, or over the radio, or who has read it in the newspapers” would forget the president’s bold stand.⁶⁷

Still others remarked how important it was that the President of the United States, himself a former Southerner, was the one delivering this message to the U.S. public. In a July 4, 1947, editorial, the *Kansas City Call*, a nationally prominent black newspaper headquartered less than ten miles from Harry Truman’s home in Independence, declared the president’s speech to be “the most forthright speech on race relations ever made by a President in modern times.” The paper also made note of Truman’s decision to address the NAACP in person, writing, “There was a time when it would have been considered ‘too radical’ for the chief executive of the land to appear before a gathering dedicated to fight for equal rights for Negro citizens.” But while “[o]ther presidents have sent messages of greeting to the association . . . Truman is the first to appear in person.” To conclude, the paper opined:

When Truman went to Washington, he forgot the customs and habits of Missouri and became a true representative of democratic government [sic]. In his speech at the Lincoln Memorial Sunday, he stated in words similar to those used for years by the Negro press

and the N.A.A.C.P. that the United States must make democracy work at home before it can preach it abroad.”⁶⁸

In another telling account, the *Los Angeles Sentinel* declared that “[i]n telling the world that it is high time for the national government to step in and show the way to guarantee basic civil rights to all citizens regardless of race or color . . . the President lashed out at that firmly knit band of southern Democrats which has long held the whip-hand over the policies and practices of the Democratic party.” The editorial continued,

It is indeed heartwarming when these words come not from the Negro Press or Negro spokesmen alone, but when they are uttered by the highest elective [sic] official in the country. Having thus openly and courageously defied the rabid reactionaries in his own party, Mr. Truman is in an excellent position to push through the present session . . . the anti-lynching bill, FEPC and the anti-poll tax bill, all of which, as he so clearly implies, are sorely needed if American democracy is to be accepted throughout the world as good coin.⁶⁹

But perhaps the most candid assessment of Truman’s speech to the NAACP came from the *Pittsburgh Courier* almost two weeks after the event. In an editorial entitled “Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. Truman,” the paper called the president’s address “remarkably sincere and forceful . . . not only highly praiseworthy but invited comparison with his predecessor who enjoyed to far greater degree the affection of colored Americans.” After this indirect reference to FDR, the paper made its comparison explicit:

The NAACP was never able to get Mr. Roosevelt on its conference platform at any time during his occupancy of the White House, although he did send a routine message to each annual conference as a President does to all gatherings of national importance. We cannot recall when the gentleman who now sleeps at Hyde Park made such a forthright statement against racial discrimination, mob violence, color prejudice and in favor of “freedom and equality to all our citizens,” except on the occasion in the autumn of 1933 when two white men were mobbed and killed at San Jose, Calif. . . . Here we have a President saying that a revolution in American mores must be worked here and now, and this is the more remarkable when one considers Mr. Truman’s origin and antecedents as contrasted with those of Mr. Roosevelt.

In this remarkable statement, the *Pittsburgh Courier* went so far as to state openly that Truman “in speech and action where colored Americans are concerned he is looming, on the record, to greater stature than his predecessor” and deserved “high praise for his sincerity and forthrightness after a long era of double-talk and political expediency.”⁷⁰

In addition to widespread newspaper coverage of Truman’s address to the NAACP, *Universal International Newsreel* also featured a one-and-a-half-minute clip of Truman’s speech in their June 30, 1947, newsreel broadcast circulated around the country.⁷¹ This report, entitled “Truman Asks Equality for All Americans,” featured powerful images of Truman standing on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, his body dwarfed by the large statue of the former president behind him. The voice-over reported that 10,000 individuals gathered at the “memorial to the Great Emancipator in Washington” listened as “President Truman strongly advocate[d] freedom and equality for all United States citizens.” The camera angle included footage of Truman behind the podium with Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt directly to the president’s left. These images, coupled with live footage of Truman’s declaration that “all Americans” should enjoy the rights

of citizenship, visually emphasized the importance of Truman's location. Moreover, this coupling of text and image invited viewers to interpret the president's definitive statement, "When I say all Americans, I mean all Americans," in relation to Abraham Lincoln's status as the "Great Emancipator" and previous rhetoric in this place.

These newspaper reports and newsreel coverage of Truman's speech to the NAACP on June 29, 1947, reinforce the rhetorical significance not just of the Lincoln Memorial, but the inherent symbolism of President Truman's presidential presence in that place. These accounts also suggest that Truman's audience saw his speech as both a presidential directive for domestic policy and as a clear articulation of the United States' foreign policy at the dawn of the Cold War. These themes were also reflected in the mail U.S. citizens sent to Truman after his address.

Citizen Letters

Many ordinary citizens wrote letters to the president following his June 29, 1947, speech to the NAACP. These responses are particularly insightful because they provide first-person accounts of audience reactions to Truman's speech and also reflect civic attitudes of the day. Because the Truman Library did not keep all letters received following this speech, I do not make the claim that these are representative of U.S. public opinion or even a representative sampling of Truman's audience. However, they do offer important insights in thinking about how Truman linked his political authority to advancing civil rights on the domestic front and also setting up the United States as an example of democratic liberty for the rest of the world.

Several citizens made Truman's political authority and sectional affiliation the focus of their remarks, with some even commenting on their own Southern affiliation. Elinore Cowan Stone of Wilkensburg, Pennsylvania, wrote to Truman immediately after his speech. Although she confessed that she believed "writing my President a letter is just spilling words into the air," she told him that she "felt that you had hit the nail on the head when you said that if we did not put our own race situation in order – or words to that effect – we could not hope to make the rest of the world believe that our democracy was honest." She then explained that, "[i]n case it makes any difference, I do not belong to the 'colored' race. As a matter of fact, my mother, whose ancestors were slave-owners in Virginia, would probably turn over in her grave if she knew that her daughter was sponsoring the idea that Negro citizens should have an even break." And yet, explained Cowan Stone, "I very much hope that you will stand behind what you said to-night as courageously as you have stood behind some of your other convictions in the past weeks."⁷² Abmond Maxwell also referenced his Southern upbringing in his letter to the president, and yet noted that "[w]ithout any qualification, [Truman's address to the NAACP] thrilled me more than any speech of any president I have heard. I am white, born, reared and educated in Georgia, but the things you said are the chief reasons I am glad to be an American. Those faults in our country you humbly acknowledged, and the high ideals the people and yourself are dedicated, give the strongest, frankest, clearest, and most [undecipherable] statement to our Foreign policy that I have heard."⁷³

But for others, Truman's stance on civil rights was a violation of his Southern ancestry—and their own political freedom. L.H. Moore from Norfolk, Virginia, wrote, "Your speech disgusted me a Democrat Missouri born."⁷⁴ Otis Chandler of Birmingham, Alabama, made the point succinctly: "In the south I don't like what you are doing with the Negroes you won't get any where [sic]."⁷⁵ Catherine J. Moroney of Washington, D.C., wrote: "Will you consider the

feelings of the American people and stop trying to solve the world's problems. The speech you gave for the NAACP is your opinion. But why has the President a right to force his opinion and choice of race on the masses of people. You, Mrs. Roosevelt and fellow travelers are entitled to associate or work with all the Negroes you want to, but there are many Americans that do not want to. Will you please remember this is a free country. And let us be free. And not forced. You are only the President, not all of the American people."⁷⁶

Another prominent theme in these letters is the clear understanding many citizens had of the relationship between civil rights at home and the United States' role abroad. Thomas L. Cowan from Brooklyn, New York, told the president that he had listened to his "magnificent and eloquent address delivered against intolerance at the Lincoln Memorial" and was confident that "millions of Americans, in all parts of the Country applauded your vigorous attacks against this cancer that affects the body politic, and will support every move to eradicate it." Mr. Cowan told Truman that his speech demonstrated a "bold but immortal stand" and "America through you and with you in the vanguard will lead the world out of the nightmare of promises unkept, into the daylight of the Four Freedoms with Liberty and Justice for all."⁷⁷

Bishop Buford F. Gordon of Charlotte, North Carolina, sent a telegram congratulating the president on his "address at the Lincoln Memorial today. It was prophetic and expressed the convictions of all people interested in the fulfillment of a vigilant exemplary democracy."⁷⁸ Dr. Evalyn Lowes Davis of Los Angeles, California, wrote, "I believe in every statement you made, and do admire your courage in giving to the world the true democratic law as expressed in our Constitution."⁷⁹ Andrew G. Freeman of Freeman, Ohio, told the president that his speech "should meet with the approval of All Americans. It certainly does with mine. Americans may disagree on how to secure civil rights for all, but we should all present a united front in matters affecting the implementation of democratic principles and the effect such action has in our relationships with nations all over the world."⁸⁰ Louise M. Spoerri of Santa Monica, California, expressed similar sentiments when she told Truman that if things remained as they were in the United States, "I do not blame those nations across the water for pointing their fingers at us in derision as they do when we speak of democracy. . . . If things go on as they have been most of the people who are fine and true and just will be ashamed of being white people and ashamed of what we stand for and do not enforce."⁸¹

Other citizens described the newfound pride and ownership they felt upon hearing Truman's speech. Percival Sills of Rockaway Beach, New York, wrote to "His Excellency Harry S. Truman" to tell him that he was "electrified by your words." "Surely a Government which has the power to transport its citizens in far-off lands in the country's defense when danger threatens is not impotent to grant these same citizens the necessary protection when danger to liberty threatens here at home." In language strikingly similar to John F. Kennedy's declaration sixteen years later in West Berlin, Mr. Sills remarked:

In ancient days the expression "Civis Romanus sum" meant a great deal. I, as a naturalized citizen and U.S. soldier in World War I, want to be able to lift up [my] head high and say with pride, when the occasion warrants it: "I am an American citizen," something I have been unable to say until now because so many wrongs and injustices were committed against the individual and these with impunity and without a word of protest from those charged with the enforcement of the provisions of the Constitution of the United States.⁸²

For Sherman Briscoe of Washington, D.C., Truman's speech convinced him "for the first time that I had a full share in the American way of life." Mr. Briscoe also predicted that "white Americans, too, must have felt better after hearing your talk. For they realized that at last their country was ready to take a responsible attitude in the matter of racial relations."⁸³

Several letters, both those in support of the president's speech and those adamantly opposed to his proposals, commented that Truman's remarks would cost him votes in the 1948 presidential election. Lowell C. Frost wrote the president to offer "hearty commendation of your speech at the Lincoln Memorial last night. . . . That speech (as you knew it would) lost for you many votes. But I believe that its sincerity and forthrightness gave to you a firm foundation and the staunch support of many more friends who feel as you do about the essential unity of the American people."⁸⁴ An attorney from Chicago, Truman K. Gibson, Jr., told the president that "[t]here is no better person than yourself to impress the facts of life on the citizens of our country. There are too many of us today who do not yet realize that we cannot longer drift along letting things take care of themselves." Although the president's speech would "probably be criticized in many quarters," Mr. Gibson said that he was "writing to let you know that there are many who heartily agree with you in this and other issues."⁸⁵

Those who disapproved of Truman's address were much more direct—and nasty. Cecil H. Piatt from Tucson, Arizona, wrote: "Your idiotic speech to NAACP means only you approve negro social equality. I for one am ready to fight from now on. If you are willing to face war at home keep on this track. Cecil H. Piatt. Yesterday, Today, Forever Ku Klux Klan."⁸⁶ Louis F. Lawler of San Diego, California, wrote: "I have just read the newspaper account of your speech to the National Society for the Advancement of the Colored Race. Scratch one Democratic vote for '48."⁸⁷ Mrs. J.M. McCreary of Wichita Falls, Texas, wrote, "I agree with you for the Negro's rights but was so glad to notice you did not use the word equality with the races as Mrs. Roosevelt so much wants and that I know Mrs. Truman was not for."⁸⁸

Although the majority of these public opinion letters were written to thank President Truman for his courageous remarks, several were particularly degrading. I quote two of them below, not to privilege this perspective in any way, but because I believe these letters offer an important insight into the daily realities black citizens faced. These letters also reveal just what Truman was up against as he sought to make civil rights a reality for "all Americans."

Sherman Riley, Sr. of Lufkin, Texas, was, to put it mildly, livid. "Referring to your talk at the Lincoln Memorial regarding 'racial prejudice.' Of course, anyone knows your words were uttered for one purpose – to try to secure the nigger votes." Mr. Lufkin continued,

But will you tell me why such a speech was necessary, why stir up this question, it only leads the nigger to believe he is equal to the white man, which any schoolboy knows is not true, and it gives the nigger a license to become insulting and overbearing, and the words and deeds of nigger loving Mrs. Roosevelt is already manifesting itself in the actions of the Southern nigger, while previously there was no strife, no trouble, between niggers and whites. Such speeches as yours only tends [sic] to make the race question become a thousand times more serious and dangerous. . . . I have the first person yet to meet who has any good word for this woman [Eleanor Roosevelt], who wants to attend to everyone else's affairs, but her own. She is the laughing stock of the country, and from your speech it is apparent she now has you 'roped in.'"⁸⁹

Riley's letter expresses not only his deep hatred for African American citizens, but his belief (shared by many other Southerners) that that any political support for racial equity made the issue "a thousand times more dangerous." This particular missive also demonstrates why Truman's presidential presence before the NAACP at the Lincoln Memorial was so radical—and offensive to Southerners. In publically declaring his support for the NAACP and extending civil rights to "all Americans," Truman deflated white supremacist hopes that this "son of an unreconstructed rebel mother" would champion their cause.⁹⁰

In another particularly offensive missive, Rufus R. Todd from Opelika, Alabama, wrote to Truman:

I have just returned from the theater where I heard your speech on equality of the races. Never have I heard a silence so elequent [sic] from both the white audience, and the colored in the balcony finally from the colored balcony there arose a murmer [sic] of despair, of rage, and fear, on the street as I left the theater I heard a young negro say 'Yankees are the worst enemys [sic] a pore [sic] niggers got if they would have these white folks down here alone we would get along a lot better.' . . . I feel a deep sympathy for them, but knowing their good points I understand also their weaknesses and short comings that so unfit them for full equality with white people. . . . You must consider that it was but a few short generations ago that the negroes was [sic] brought from the Jungles, so the race as a whole can not [sic] be judged by a few of the most intelligent ones, as thinking people we must accept the negro for what he is[,] not what we would like him to be. . . . I'm afraid your speech gave the confirdence [sic] of the people of the south a severe jolt."⁹¹

Indeed, Truman's speech to the NAACP, and his major domestic initiatives on civil rights, gave the South more than a "severe jolt."

Despite these examples of overt racism and pure hatred for African American citizens, Truman's address to the NAACP had far-reaching implications at home and abroad. In one of the most rhetorically potent missives from the archive, Dorothy W. Chance of Memphis, Tennessee, explained why the president's speech was so significant to her—and for the entire nation.

It is only a couple of months now since I was in Japan with the American Red Cross. I am an American Negro. It was often difficult to answer interrogating Japanese who wanted to know more about our democracy and why we as Negroes who "are Americans too" are segregated and discriminated against. I listened to many of our soldiers try to explain to them the stages of American History, of Negro slavery, its abolition and the progress of the race that is being made today. But always they were as able as we to point to phrases in the Emancipation Proclamation and the Constitution of the United States of America – "the liberty and justice to all" phrases. It was not simple to try to explain American democracy in the light of all the questions they asked us. Your speech today brought more faith and hope than all the speeches I've ever heard anywhere. My prayers are for you that your words will not fall on deaf ears of those who are able to help make civil rights a realization for all people, and that all Americans will always be worthy of equal civil rights.⁹²

For Mrs. Chance, and millions of African American citizens, the president's speech to the NAACP on June 29, 1947, offered at least a hope that the United States of America would take steps to

secure the rights and liberties guaranteed in the nation's foundational documents, steps that would enable the nation to make the case for democracy to the world.

Conclusion

In his acclaimed biography of Truman, David McCullough explained the significance of the president's address to the NAACP this way: "That someone of his background from western Missouri could be standing at the shrine of the Great Emancipator saying such things was almost inconceivable."⁹³ On June 29, 1947, the president activated the symbolic resonances of Lincoln's political legacy and the memories embedded in this particular location while linking his own *ethos*—as expressed through his rhetorical authority as president of the United States and his personal history with race relations—to the NAACP. Although he delivered this speech in the United States, Truman's rhetoric transcended his immediate location and circulated around the globe as a powerful argument at the dawn of the Cold War. The president used this occasion to tell the nation and the world that the United States would "get its own house in order" to prove to the world that U.S. democracy was, in fact, superior to Soviet communism (17).

Truman's speech at the Lincoln Memorial also lent institutional authority to the NAACP's strategic adaption of the site as a locus for civil rights activism. Building on the symbolism and shared public memory of Marian Anderson's 1939 Easter Sunday concert, the president's physical presence in this place and before this audience solidified once and for all the Lincoln Memorial as a commonplace symbolizing the United States' commitment to extending the rights and liberties laid out in the U.S. Constitution to "all Americans" (3). After Truman, other U.S. presidents returned here to honor Lincoln's memory as the Great Emancipator and to call for advances in civil rights. Of course, the March on Washington and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech on August 28, 1963, offered the most powerful invocation of Lincoln's memory and the place-as-rhetoric of the Lincoln Memorial. Yet the very choice of the Lincoln Memorial as the site for King's address suggests that earlier rhetorical work in this place—such as Anderson's 1939 concert and Truman's 1947 address to the NAACP—made it a particularly persuasive rhetorical resource.

Of particular note is Lyndon B. Johnson's frequent return to the Lincoln Memorial during his civil rights campaign. In December 1963, just one month after John F. Kennedy's assassination, Lyndon B. Johnson spoke at a candlelight vigil at the Lincoln Memorial. Four weeks earlier, in an Address to a Joint Session of Congress on November 27, Johnson had argued that the best way to honor Kennedy's memory was to ensure "the earliest possible passage of a civil rights bill for which he fought so long."⁹⁴ Johnson continued this argument in his ceremonial remarks at the Lincoln Memorial, reassuring his audience that they had been "bent in sorrow, but not in purpose. We buried Abraham Lincoln and John Kennedy, but we did not bury their dreams or their visions. They are our dreams and our visions for today."⁹⁵ Less than two months later, Johnson used the occasion of Lincoln's 155th birthday to reaffirm the United States' moral obligation to carry out "the new birth of freedom that [Lincoln] promised" for "[t]his is the unfinished work to which we, the living, must dedicate ourselves."⁹⁶ Three years later, in 1967, Johnson returned to the national shrine and described Abraham Lincoln as "the 'Great Emancipator'—of black and white alike."⁹⁷ And in 1968, Johnson spoke at a

ceremony commemorating Lincoln's 159th birthday, telling his audience that "[a]cross the world, whenever men have sought to breathe free and stand tall—they have looked to Lincoln." Johnson went on to describe how Lincoln's legacy extended beyond the United States and across the globe: "On five continents, in shacks and huts and slums, and in drawing rooms as well—if men sought dignity, there was a picture of Abraham Lincoln tacked on the wall. Those pictures in the places where men dream of freedom give us a true perspective of America's role in the world over the last 100 years."

Like Truman, Johnson held up Lincoln's memory as an inspiration to millions seeking freedom—a description particularly poignant in 1968, twenty years into the Cold War. Like Truman, Johnson also insisted that the U.S. public look inward, not simply outward, and consider how the "revolutionary American dream of human dignity and quality for all" was enacted at home. In his conclusion, Johnson noted the symbolic significance of his location—and the previous rhetorical action that happened in this place:

These marble steps in recent years have borne eloquent witness to responsible dissent. A hundred years after the Emancipation Proclamation, a vast convocation of peoples have met here peacefully and dramatically to call upon all of us to honor our commitment to human rights for all of us. Today, we rededicate ourselves at this place to Lincoln's cause, the cause of full equality.⁹⁸

Here Johnson called his audience yet again to rededicate themselves to Lincoln's vision for "full equality" for all citizens—a vision that Truman had first articulated from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and one that Johnson was determined to carry out.

William Leuchtenburg argues that Truman's civil rights agenda "proved to be the end of the Solid South, at least of a South solid for the Democrats," writing that although it was Lyndon Johnson who "pushed through far-reaching civil rights legislation . . . Truman is the one who opened the fissure that would never be mended."⁹⁹ Through his rhetoric in place on June 29, 1947, Truman constituted the Lincoln Memorial as a Cold War commonplace, a place of return for future civil rights activists and U.S. presidents to deploy as a material means of persuasion. But what was even more remarkable about Truman's address to the NAACP is that he, a son of the South, was speaking on behalf of the organization at a site originally designed to promote national unity—and silence Lincoln's stance on slavery and emancipation. It is precisely because of these inherent tensions that Truman's speech was so remarkable—and rhetorically significant.

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Notes

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- ¹ David McCullough, *Truman* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1992), 569.
- ² Garth E. Pauley, "Harry Truman and the NAACP: A Case Study in Presidential Persuasion on Civil Rights," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 2, no. 2 (1999): 213. See also Garth E. Pauley, *The Modern Presidency & Civil Rights: Rhetoric on Race from Roosevelt to Nixon* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2001).
- ³ Clark Clifford to Harry S. Truman, "Memorandum for the President, Subject: The 1948 Campaign," August 17, 1948, Clark M. Clifford Papers, Political File, Harry S. Truman Library, http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/1948campaign/large/docs/documents/index.php?pagenumber=1&documentdate=1948-08-17&documentid=1-2&studycollectionid=Election.
- ⁴ All passages from Truman's June 29, 1947, Address to the NAACP are cited with reference to paragraph numbers in the printed text that accompanies this essay on the VOD website.
- ⁵ Martin Gilbert, *Churchill and America* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2005), 353. The first time Churchill used this particular phrase was in a secret memorandum to President Harry Truman on May 12, 1945. The phrase would be popularized after Churchill's commencement address at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, on March 5, 1946. For more on this speech, see McCullough, *Truman*, 486-90.
- ⁶ Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 12.
- ⁷ See Denise M. Bostdorff, *Proclaiming the Truman Doctrine: The Cold War Call to Arms* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2008).
- ⁸ William E. Leuchtenburg, "The Conversion of Harry Truman," *American Heritage* 42, no. 7 (1991), <http://www.americanheritage.com/content/conversion-harry-truman>.
- ⁹ David Goldfield, "Border Men: Truman, Eisenhower, Johnson, and Civil Rights," *Journal of Southern History* 80, no. 1 (2014): 12. Thomas Borstlemann has noted that "Truman remained a racist in his personal attitudes: he opposed what he called social equality of the races and continued privately to disparage nonwhite peoples on occasion . . . [but] for a man of his place and time, the Missourian made impressive strides on matters of race." See William E. Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Lyndon B. Johnson* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 151.
- ¹⁰ Leuchtenburg observes that Truman's actions on race relations as a public official in Missouri and as U.S. senator "appears to have derived both from conviction and from self-interest . . . Truman always had to bear in mind that there were a great many African-American voters in Missouri." See Leuchtenburg, "The Conversion of Harry Truman."
- ¹¹ Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South*, 157.
- ¹² See Jay P. Childers, "Transforming Violence into a Focusing Event: A Reception Study of the 1946 Georgia Lynching," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 19, no. 4 (2016): 571-600.
- ¹³ For more on Truman's executive action, see Steven R. Goldzwig, "Inaugurating the Second Reconstruction: President Truman's Committee on Civil Rights," in *Civil Rights Rhetoric and the American Presidency*, ed. James Arnt Aune and Enrique D. Rigsby (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2005), 83-113; Raymond H. Geselbracht, *The Civil Rights Legacy of Harry S. Truman* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2007), 183.
- ¹⁴ Leuchtenburg, "The Conversion of Harry Truman."
- ¹⁵ Leuchtenburg, "The Conversion of Harry Truman."
- ¹⁶ Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 24.
- ¹⁷ Raymond Frey, "Truman's Speech to the NAACP, 29 June 1947," in *The Civil Rights Legacy of Harry S. Truman*, ed. Raymond H. Geselbracht (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2007), 93.
- ¹⁸ Walter White, *A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White* (New York, NY: The Viking Press, 1948), 329-32.
- ¹⁹ White, *A Man Called White*, 347-48.
- ²⁰ Scott A. Sandage, "A Marble House Divided: The Lincoln Memorial, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Politics of Memory, 1939-1963," *The Journal of American History* 80, no. 1 (1993): 139.
- ²¹ Royal Cortissoz to Henry Bacon, April 6, 1919, as quoted in Sandage, "A Marble House Divided," 141.

²² Warren G. Harding, "Address by the Hon. Warren G. Harding, President of the United States," May 30, 1922, printed in Edward Franklin Concklin, ed. *The Lincoln Memorial in Washington* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1927), 87.

²³ Harding, "Address," in Concklin, *The Lincoln Memorial*, 88.

²⁴ J. Le Count Chestnut, "Mock Ideal of Lincoln at Memorial: Have Jim Crow Services; Prominent Citizens Offered Insults," *Chicago Defender*, June 10, 1922, p. 1.

²⁵ Walter White to Marian Anderson, March 24, 1939. NAACP Papers; Collection: Papers of the NAACP, Part 02: 1919-1939, Personal Correspondence of Selected NAACP Files; Series: Personal Correspondence of NAACP Officials; Folder: 001464-019-0686 (Walter White Correspondence March 1939), ProQuest History Vault.

²⁶ "Eleanor Roosevelt and Marian Anderson," FDR Presidential Library & Museum, <https://fdrlibrary.org/anderson>.

²⁷ "The Triumph of Marian Anderson," *Chicago Defender*, April 22, 1939, p. 14.

²⁸ "Miss Anderson to Sing at Lincoln Shrine," *Washington Post*, March 31, 1939, p. 11; Edward T. Folliard, "Ickes Introduces Contralto at Lincoln Memorial," *Washington Post*, April 10, 1939, p. 1; Sandage, "A Marble House Divided," 145.

²⁹ Harold L. Ickes, "Address," April 9, 1939, printed in "Text of Secretary Ickes Speech at Anderson Easter Recital," *Chicago Defender*, April 15, 1939, p. 2.

³⁰ Edward S. Casey, "Public Memory in Place and Time," in *Framing Public Memory*, ed. Kendall R. Phillips (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 32.

³¹ Walter White to David K. Niles, April 11, 1947; White House Central Files: Official File 413 – National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [1 of 2], Box 1382; Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library; Press Release, "Pres. Truman to Speak at NAACP 38th Conference," May 30, 1947, NAACP Papers; Collection: Papers of the NAACP, Part 01: Meetings of the Board of Directors, Records of Annual Conferences, Major Speeches, and Special Reports; Series: Annual Conference Proceedings, 1910-1950 cont.; Folder: 001412-012-0000, ProQuest History Vault. Marian Anderson did not sing at the actual event, most likely due to her illness during the spring and summer of 1947.

³² Press Release, "Largest Mass Meeting in Nation's History Planned by NAACP," June 6, 1947, NAACP Papers; Collection: Papers of the NAACP, Part 01: Meetings of the Board of Directors, Records of Annual Conferences, Major Speeches, and Special Reports; Series: Annual Conference Proceedings, 1910-1950 cont.; Folder: 001412-012-0000, ProQuest History Vault.

³³ David K. Niles to Matthew J. Connelly, "Memorandum, Subject: Proposed Speech by the President to the NAACP," June 16, 1947. Papers of George Elsey, Box 17; Folder: 1947 – June 29 – NAACP Speech; Harry S. Truman Library. Interestingly, Niles' memo to Connelly is identical to an earlier memo Niles received from Philleo Nash, a special assistant in the White House who was also an African American. For more discussion of Nash's role in writing this speech, see Pauley, "Harry Truman and the NAACP: A Case Study in Presidential Persuasion on Civil Rights," 223.

³⁴ Miscellaneous Note, no author, no date, Papers of George Elsey, Box 17; Folder: 1947 – June 29 – NAACP Speech; Harry S. Truman Library.

³⁵ George Elsey, *An Unplanned Life: A Memoir by George McKee Elsey* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 154.

³⁶ Walter White to David K. Niles, April 11, 1947, White House Central Files: Official File 413 – National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [1 of 2], Box 1382; Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

³⁷ Press Release, "NAACP 38th Conference Held Internationally Important," June 13, 1947, NAACP Papers; Collection: Papers of the NAACP, Part 01: Meetings of the Board of Directors, Records of Annual Conferences, Major Speeches, and Special Reports; Series: Annual Conference Proceedings, 1910-1950 cont.; Folder: 001412-012-0000, ProQuest History Vault; White, *A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White*, 348.

³⁸ "Truman Asks Equality for All Americans," *Universal News* Vol. 20, Rel. 52, Story 1, June 30, 1947, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bdNMhmcVqCU&feature=youtu.be>. In a memo to Niles, White informed him that "Arrangements will also be made to have the ceremony photographed for newsreels and possibly to have the entire occasion televised." Walter White to David K. Niles, April 11, 1947, White House Central Files: Official File 413 – National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [1 of 2], Box 1382; Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

³⁹ Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South*, 160.

⁴⁰ "Mr. Truman and Human Rights," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 5, 1947.

⁴¹ “4th Draft, 6-29-47,” Address to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, President’s Secretary’s Files, Box 38, Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library; “Original Reading Copy Used by President Truman at the Closing Session of the 38th Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Lincoln Memorial, Washington, D.C.,” President’s Secretary’s Files, Box 24, Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁴² To listen to Truman’s speech as captured via radio, please visit the recording provided by the University of Virginia’s Miller Center (<http://millercenter.org/president/truman/speeches/speech-3345>). This particular line begins at -10:39.

⁴³ Abraham Lincoln, “Emancipation Proclamation,” January 1, 1863,

https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured_documents/emancipation_proclamation/transcript.html.

⁴⁴ “3rd Draft,” June 28, 1947, Papers of George Elsey, Box 17, Folder: 1947 – June 29 – NAACP Speech, Harry S. Truman Library. The phrase “birthright” also has biblical connotations, particularly in relation to the inheritance rights first-born males enjoyed (such as Esau’s inheritance from his father, Isaac, that he sold to his brother Jacob).

⁴⁵ “3rd Draft,” June 28, 1947, Truman Library.

⁴⁶ For more on the relationship between these cover images and FDR’s 1941 State of the Union address, see James J. Kimble, “The Illustrated Four Freedoms: FDR, Rockwell, and the Margins of the Rhetorical Presidency,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (2015): 46-69.

⁴⁷ Merrill D. Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), 132.

⁴⁸ On June 16, 1858, Lincoln accepted the Republican Party’s nomination for the U.S. Senate race in Illinois, a contest he eventually would lose to Democratic incumbent Stephen Douglas. In the speech, Lincoln used a similar metaphor to describe the nation’s division over the question of slavery: “A house divided against itself cannot stand.” He continued, “I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved – I do not expect the house to fall – but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery, will arrest this further spread and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is on a course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates shall press it forward, until it shall become alike lawful in all of the States, old as well as new – North as well as South.” Abraham Lincoln, “A House Divided,” June 16, 1858, <http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/lincoln-a-house-divided-speech-text/>.

⁴⁹ “4th Draft, 6-29-47,” Address to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, President’s Secretary’s Files, Box 38, Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁵⁰ Harding, “Address,” in Conklin, *The Lincoln Memorial in Washington*, 87.

⁵¹ Abraham Lincoln, “Response to Evangelical Lutherans,” May 13, 1862, in *The Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. John H. Clifford and Marion M. Miller (New York, NY: Newton & Cartwright, 1907), 156-157.

⁵² Harry S. Truman to Mary Truman, June 28, 1947, Papers of Harry S. Truman: Post-Presidential File, Harry S. Truman Library,

http://www.trumanlibrary.org/flip_books/index.php?collectionid=ihow&groupid=3722&tldate=1947-06-28.

⁵³ Press Release, “Far Reaching Benefits Seen in Truman Speech,” July 11, 1947, found in Annual Convention, 1947, including program and resolutions, Mar 25, 1947 – Jun 29, 1947, Folder: 001412-012-0000, Papers of the NAACP, Part 01: Meetings of the Board of Directors, Records of Annual Conferences, Major Speeches, and Special Reports, ProQuest History Vault.

⁵⁴ Walter White to Harry S. Truman, July 9, 1947, PPF 200; Folder: 6/29/47 – Speech at the Closing Session of the 38th Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Pro), Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁵⁵ White also noted the fierce Southern response to Truman’s speech, writing that “[i]f [Truman] had any premonition of the savage assaults which were destined to be made upon him by Southern governors, senators, and congressmen when he asked the Congress to act upon the issues he had discussed in his speech, or if he had any fear of the consequences, he showed no signs of it.” White, *A Man Called White*, 348-49.

⁵⁶ Channing Tobias to Harry S. Truman, July 8, 1947, PPF 200, Folder: 6/29/47 – Speech at the Closing Session of the 38th Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Pro), Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁵⁷ “My Day, Key Events,” American Experience, PBS.org,

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/primary-resources/eleanor-my-day>.

⁵⁸ Newspaper Clipping of Eleanor Roosevelt, "My Day" Column, July 2, 1947, found in Papers of George Else, Box 17, Folder: 1947 – June 29 – NAACP Speech, Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁵⁹ "'U.S. Must Lead Anti-Hate Drive': Complete Text of Truman's Speech," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 5, 1947; "Truman Urges Equality for All," *Atlanta Daily World*, July 3, 1947; "Text of Talk by Truman to NAACP," *Washington Post*, June 30, 1947; "President Truman's Speech to NAACP on Human Rights," *New York Times*, June 30, 1947.

⁶⁰ "Text of Talk by Truman to NAACP"; "President Truman's Speech to NAACP on Human Rights"; "U.S. Must Lead Anti-Hate Drive."

⁶¹ "Not What, But How," *Christian Science Monitor*, July 1, 1947.

⁶² "Mr. Truman on Civil Rights," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 30, 1947.

⁶³ "Truman Asks Action 'Now' on Racism," *Chicago Defender*, July 5, 1947.

⁶⁴ "Gov't Must Insure Rights to All -- Truman Stresses 'All Americans' Must Benefit," *Atlanta Daily World*, July 1, 1947.

⁶⁵ "'U.S. Must Lead Anti-Hate Drive.'"

⁶⁶ "Benefits Seen from Truman Rights Speech: Southern Press Comments with Favor on Talk," *Atlanta Daily World*, July 17, 1947.

⁶⁷ "Mr. Truman and Human Rights."

⁶⁸ "Truman's Speech Makes History," *The Call*, July 4, 1947, found attached to a letter from Emmett A. Scanlan, Jr., to Matt Connelly, July 7, 1947, PPF 200, Folder: 6/29/47 – Speech at the Closing Session of the 38th Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Pro), Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁶⁹ "Truman Tells the World," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, July 3, 1947.

⁷⁰ "Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. Truman," *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 12, 1947.

⁷¹ Ed Herlihy, "Truman Asks Equality for All Americans," *Universal International Newsreel*, Universal News Vol. 20, Rel. 52, Story 1. June 30, 1947, National Archives and Records Administration, accessed December 30, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bdNMhmcVqCU&feature=youtu.be>.

⁷² Elinore Cowan Stone to Harry Truman, June 29, 1947, PPF 200, Folder: 6/29/47 – Speech at the Closing Session of the 38th Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Pro), Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁷³ Abmond Maxwell to Harry Truman, July 1, 1947, PPF 200, Folder: 6/29/47 – Speech at the Closing Session of the 38th Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Pro), Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁷⁴ L.H. Moore to Harry Truman, June 29, 1947, PPF 200, Folder: 6/29/47 – Speech at the Closing Session of the 38th Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Con), Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁷⁵ Otis Chandler to Harry Truman, June 29, 1947, PPF 200, Folder: 6/29/47 – Speech at the Closing Session of the 38th Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Con), Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁷⁶ Catherine J. Moroney to Harry Truman, June 30, 1947, PPF 200, Folder: 6/29/47 – Speech at the Closing Session of the 38th Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Con), Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁷⁷ Thomas L. Cowen to Harry Truman, June 29, 1947, PPF 200, Folder: 6/29/47 – Speech at the Closing Session of the 38th Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Pro), Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁷⁸ Buford F. Gordon to Harry S. Truman, June 29, 1947, PPF 200, Folder: 6/29/47 – Speech at the Closing Session of the 38th Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Pro), Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁷⁹ Evalyn Lowes Davis to Harry Truman, June 29, 1947, PPF 200, Folder: 6/29/47 – Speech at the Closing Session of the 38th Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Pro), Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

⁸⁰ Andrew G. Freeman to Harry Truman, no date, PPF 200, Folder: 6/29/47 – Speech at the Closing Session of the 38th Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Pro), Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

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- ⁸¹ Louise M. Spoerri to Harry Truman, July 3, 1947, PPF 200, Folder: 6/29/47 – Speech at the Closing Session of the 38th Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Pro), Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
- ⁸² Percival Sills to Harry Truman, June 30, 1947, PPF 200, Folder: 6/29/47 – Speech at the Closing Session of the 38th Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Pro), Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
- ⁸³ Sherman Briscoe to Harry Truman, July 2, 1947, PPF 200, Folder: 6/29/47 – Speech at the Closing Session of the 38th Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Pro), Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
- ⁸⁴ Lowell C. Frost to Harry Truman, June 30, 1947, PPF 200, Folder: 6/29/47 – Speech at the Closing Session of the 38th Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Pro), Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
- ⁸⁵ Truman K. Gibson, Jr. to Harry Truman, June 30, 1947, PPF 200, Folder: 6/29/47 – Speech at the Closing Session of the 38th Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Pro), Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
- ⁸⁶ Cecil H. Piatt to Harry Truman, July 1, 1947, PPF 200, Folder: 6/29/47 – Speech at the Closing Session of the 38th Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Con), Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
- ⁸⁷ Louis F. Lawler to Harry Truman, July 2, 1947, PPF 200, Folder: 6/29/47 – Speech at the Closing Session of the 38th Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Con), Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
- ⁸⁸ Mrs. J.M. McCreary to Harry Truman, June 30, 1947, PPF 200, Folder: 6/29/47 – Speech at the Closing Session of the 38th Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Pro), Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
- ⁸⁹ Sherman Riley, Sr. to Harry Truman, June 30, 1947, PPF 200, Folder: 6/29/47 – Speech at the Closing Session of the 38th Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Con), Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
- ⁹⁰ Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South*, 160.
- ⁹¹ Rufus R. Todd to Harry Truman, July 6, 1947, PPF 200, Folder: 6/29/47 – Speech at the Closing Session of the 38th Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Con), Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
- ⁹² Dorothy W. Chance to Harry Truman, June 30, 1947, PPF 200, Folder: 6/29/47 – Speech at the Closing Session of the 38th Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Pro), Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.
- ⁹³ McCullough, *Truman*, 570.
- ⁹⁴ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Address Before a Joint Session of Congress,” November 27, 1963, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25988>.
- ⁹⁵ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks at a Candlelight Memorial Service for President Kennedy,” December 22, 1963, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26576>.
- ⁹⁶ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks at the Lincoln Memorial,” February 12, 1964, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26071>.
- ⁹⁷ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks at a Ceremony at the Lincoln Memorial,” February 12, 1967, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=28549>.
- ⁹⁸ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks at a Ceremony Commemorating the 159th Birthday of Abraham Lincoln,” February 12, 1968, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29360>.
- ⁹⁹ Leuchtenburg, “The Conversion of Harry Truman.”