Kennedy, David M. Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

mained a rural people. Three of every four Negroes still dwelled in the South, the poorest inhabitants of the nation's poorest region. Jim Crow bound them to make their way warily through the shabby interstices of southern white society, well out of America's mainstream. Three-quarters of adult blacks had not finished high school. One in ten had no schooling whatever, and many more were functionally illiterate. Blacks led shorter and unhealthier lives than whites and worked at tougher and far less lucrative jobs. They earned, on the average, 39 percent of what whites made. Almost nine of ten black families eked out a living on incomes below the federal poverty threshold. Most employed black men were marooned in unskilled occupations. One-third were sharecroppers or tenant farmers. A far higher percentage of black women than white worked for wages, a majority as domestic servants or farmhands. Negroes were politically voiceless throughout the South; fewer than 5 percent of eligible blacks in the states of the old Confederacy could exercise democracy's most fundamental right, the right to vote.[26]

The continued isolation of black Americans was made achingly obvious as war mobilization began to lift the pall of the Depression. Management and labor joined arms to exclude black workers from the benefits of the war boom. "We will not employ Negroes," the president of North American Aviation flatly declared. "It is against company policy." Kansas City's Standard Steel Corporation announced: "We have not had a Negro worker in twenty-five years, and do not plan to start now." In Seattle the district organizer of the International Association of Machinists put the Boeing Aircraft Company on notice that "labor has been asked to make many sacrifices in this war," but the "sacrifice" of allowing blacks into union membership "is too great." As for the armed forces, the army deliberately replicated the patterns of civilian society by confining black troops to segregated units and assigning the bulk of them to noncombat service and construction duty. The regular army in 1940 had just five black officers, three of them chaplains. The navy accepted blacks only as messmen, cooks, and stewards; not one black man had ever attended lily-white Annapolis. The elite services of the air corps and the marines refused any black enlistments whatsoever.[27]

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[26] Gerald David Jaynes and Robin M. Williams Jr., *A Common Destiny: Blacks and American Society* (Washington: National Academy Press, 1989), 35–42, 271–73.

[27] Jervis Anderson, *A. Philip Randolph: A Biographical Portrait* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 241–42.

When Randolph and his colleagues rehearsed these matters for the president at their meeting on September 27, the president worked his customary charm, and the little delegation departed aglow with a sense of satisfaction. But just two weeks later a Roosevelt aide announced that "the policy of the War Department is not to intermingle colored and white enlisted personnel in the same regimental organizations."[28]

Randolph was stunned. It was expressly to put an end to segregation in the military that he had gone to the White House, and he thought Roosevelt had given him a sympathetic hearing. Betrayed and angry, Randolph made a historic decision. "[C]alling on the President and holding those conferences are not going to get us anywhere," he told an associate. Instead, it was time to take the campaign for Negro rights into the streets. The goal would be not simply desegregation in the military but now, even more important, jobs in defense industries. "I think we ought to get 10,000 Negroes to march on Washington in protest, march down Pennsylvania Avenue," he told an aide. This was an incendiary suggestion. Randolph was proposing to have done with the tactics of entreaty and petition and to force the government's hand with a massive public display of Negro strength. He was less concerned with formal legal rights in the South, the traditional agenda of black leaders, than with opportunities for employment in the reviving industrial economy. What was more, Randolph envisioned an all-black demonstration. "We shall not call upon our white friends to march with us," he announced. "There are some things Negroes must do alone." Randolph's strategy and objectives foreshadowed as well as inspired the civil rights movement of the postwar era, but the rich promise of that future was still veiled in 1941, and the brazen novelty of Randolph's idea rattled other Negro leaders. "It scared everybody to death," one recalled. The *Pittsburgh Courier*, the largest-circulation Negro newspaper, branded it "a crackpot proposal." White's NAACP gave only lukewarm support. But Randolph pushed on, and thousands of black men and women responded with enthusiasm. As the idea of the march caught fire in the black community, Randolph raised his sights. By the end of May his March on Washington Movement was summoning a hundred thousand Negroes to descend on the capital on July 1. "I call on Negroes everywhere," he proclaimed, "to gird for an epoch-making march."[29]

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[28] Ulysses Lee, *United States Army in World War II Special Studies: The Employment of Negro Troops* (Washington: Department of the Army, 1963), 76.

[29] Anderson, *Randolph*, 247–53.

The prospect of one hundred thousand Negroes in the streets of the capital rattled Franklin Roosevelt as well. He induced Eleanor to write a letter warning Randolph that "your group is making a very grave mistake." On June 13 the president called in National Youth Administration chief Aubrey Williams, a liberal southerner with good ties to the black community, and told him to "go to New York and try to talk Randolph and White out of this march. Get the missus and Fiorello [La Guardia, mayor of New York] and Anna [Rosenberg, a member of the Social Security Board], and get it stopped." Williams failed in his mission, but out of it came another meeting between Randolph and the president at the White House on June 18. Less than two weeks remained before the marchers were scheduled to throng Pennsylvania Avenue.[30]

Roosevelt opened the session with his customary persiflage, irrelevantly inquiring which Harvard class Randolph was in. "I never went to Harvard, Mr. President," Randolph coolly replied. "Well, Phil, what do you want me to do?" Roosevelt asked at last. Issue an executive order prohibiting discrimination in the defense plants, answered Randolph. "You know I can't do that," said Roosevelt. "In any event, I couldn't do anything unless you called off this march of yours. Questions like this can't be settled with a sledge hammer." He was sorry, said Randolph, but without an executive order the march would take place as scheduled. It was not the policy of the president of the United States to be ruled with a gun at his head, Roosevelt declared. "Call it off," he said curtly, "and we'll talk again." But Randolph was no Trotter, and he calmly stood his ground. Fiorello La Guardia finally broke the impasse. "Gentlemen," he said, "it is clear that Mr. Randolph is not going to call off the march, and I suggest we all begin to seek a formula."[31]

The formula took the shape of Executive Order 8802, issued on June 25, 1941. "There shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color, or national origin," it declared, adding that both employers and labor unions had a positive duty "to provide for the full and equitable participation of all workers in defense industries." A newly established Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) was empowered to investigate complaints and take remedial action. Ironically, there was no mention of segregation in the armed forces, the issue that had been Randolph's original concern. Yet the order represented a spectacular victory for Randolph and defined a crucial pivot in the history of African-Americans. As one Negro newspaper noted, it "demonstrated to the Doubting Thomases among us that only mass action can pry open the doors that have been erected against America's black minority." A rising mood of militancy took hold in the black community. The former Doubting Thomases at the *Pittsburgh Courier* now called for a "Double V" campaign—"victory over our enemies at home and victory over our enemies on the battlefields abroad." The war crisis presented a matchless opportunity, said the *Courier*, "to persuade, embarrass, compel and shame our government and our nation . . . into a more enlightened attitude toward a tenth of its people." The NAACP grew nearly tenfold during the war, to some half a million members. The more militant Committee (later Congress) of Racial Equality (CORE) began in 1942 to mount interracial demonstrations to force the desegregation of restaurants, theaters, and municipal bus lines. Tellingly, picketers outside a Washington, D.C., restaurant in 1944 carried placards that read: "Are you for Hitler's Way or the American Way?" and "We Die Together. Let's Eat Together."[32]

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[30] Anderson, *Randolph*, 255.

[31] Anderson, *Randolph*, 257–58.

It would be too much to say that Executive Order 8802 was a second Emancipation Proclamation. Yet, however grudgingly, Franklin Roosevelt had set the nation back on the freedom road that Abraham Lincoln had opened in the midst of another war three-quarters of a century earlier. For seven decades it had remained the road not taken. Now, for the first time since Reconstruction, the federal government had openly committed itself to making good on at least some of the promises of American life for black citizens. Coming at a moment that was kindled with opportunities for economic betterment and social mobility, Executive Order 8802 fanned the rising flame of black militancy and initiated a chain of events that would eventually end segregation once and for all and open a new era for African-Americans.

The lure of defense-industry jobs and the assurance of at least a measure of federal protection triggered an enormous black exodus from the South, one that eventually rivaled in size the huge European migrations earlier in the century. Some seven hundred thousand black civilians left the region during the war years. In every month of 1943 ten thousand Negroes, mostly from Texas and Louisiana, streamed into Los Angeles alone. Millions more abandoned the South in the two postwar decades,

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[32] Anderson, *Randolph*, 259, 260; Blum, *V Was for Victory*, 208, 217–18; Jaynes and Williams, *Common Destiny*, 63.

free at last from the stifling grip of King Cotton and keen to participate in the industrial economy. Within three decades of Pearl Harbor, a majority of blacks lived outside the states of the old Confederacy, and they no longer worked in the agricultural and domestic service sectors.[33]

The war gave Myrdal's principle of cumulation a wide new field on which to work its positive effects. The experience of Sybil Lewis was typical. When defense production began to gear up, Lewis left her position as a $3.50-per-week housemaid in Sapulpa, Oklahoma, and headed for Los Angeles, where she found employment as a $48-per-week riveter at Lockheed Aircraft. "When I got my first paycheck, I'd never seen that much money before," she remembered, "not even in the bank, because I'd never been in a bank too much." On the Lockheed assembly floor she was teamed with a "big strong white girl from a cotton farm in Arkansas." Like many of the white women in the plant, for her workmate "to say 'nigger' was just a way of life. Many of them had never been near, let alone touched a Negro." But shared work meant that "both of us [had] to relate to each other in ways that we never experienced before. Although we had our differences we both learned to work together and talk together." Repeated in thousands upon thousands of wartime workplaces, mundane encounters like Sybil Lewis's with her Arkansas co-worker began to sand away the stereotypes that had ossified under segregation. "We learned that despite our hostilities and resentments we could open up to each other and get along. . . . She learned that Negroes were people, too, and I saw her as a person also, and we both gained from it." Looking back years later, Lewis also recalled that she "saw in California that black women were working in many jobs that I had never seen in the South. . . . I saw black people accepted in the school system and accepted in other kinds of jobs that they had not been accepted in before. . . . Had it not been for the war I don't think blacks would be in the position they are in now," she concluded. "[S]ome people would never have left the South. They would have had nothing to move for." Lewis went on to college, became a civil servant, and entered the middle class. "The war," she said, "changed my life."[34]

Not every story ended as happily as Lewis's. The great black hegira, commingling with the wartime flood of white migrants, sometimes exploded into violent turbulence. In the roaring, overcrowded war-production centers, petty frictions between people who had little more in common than their shared status as war-borne nomads could erupt into ugly confrontations. Competition for scarce housing in Detroit in 1942 led a white mob, brandishing stones and clubs, to prevent three black families from moving into the Sojourner Truth Homes—a tense rehearsal for a far bloodier confrontation in Detroit a year later. "Hate strikes" were common in the defense plants, as when white women employees shut down a Western Electric factory in Baltimore rather than share a rest room with their black co-workers. In Mobile, Alabama, swollen by an influx of some forty-five thousand war-job seekers, white shipyard workers rioted in 1943 over the promotion of black welders, seriously injuring eleven Negroes. In Beaumont, Texas, plagued by shortages of housing and schools, whites rampaged through the black neighborhoods, murdering two Negroes and wounding dozens of others. Not all such outbursts were directed at blacks. Gangs of soldiers and sailors roamed the streets of Los Angeles in June 1943 attacking Mexican-American youths wearing the outsize outfits known as "zoot suits."

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[33] The postwar advent of the mechanical cotton picker, which could do the work of fifty field hands, accelerated the displacement of southern blacks.

[34] Mark Jonathan Harris et al., *The Home Front: America during World War II* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1984), 37–39, 118–21, 251–52.

By the summer of 1943 Detroit thundered with war production and throbbed with racial tensions. In the preceding three years, more than fifty thousand blacks had moved into the Detroit metropolitan area, along with some two hundred thousand whites, many of them Appalachian "hillbillies" who brought their undiluted racial prejudices with them. On Sunday, June 20, more than one hundred thousand people, most of them black, sought refuge from the cauterizing summer heat on Belle Isle, a riverfront municipal park. Scuffles broke out between black and white teenagers. By late evening a rumor pulsed through the black neighborhoods that whites had killed three Negroes. Blacks swarmed into the streets, pulled white passengers from streetcars, and beat them savagely. White mobs soon counterattacked, and wide-open racial warfare raged through the night. By the time federal troops quelled the riot at midday on the twenty-first, twenty-five blacks and nine whites were dead, including a milkman murdered while making his rounds and a doctor beaten to death on his way to a house call. Just weeks later, New York's Harlem also exploded in a riot that claimed six black lives. The carnage in Detroit even echoed in faraway England, helping to spark a vicious racial brawl among American troops encamped at Bamber Bridge, in Lancashire.[35]

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[35] Alan Clive, *State of War: Michigan in World War II* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1979), 94, 133, 156–62.

Some of the worst racial clashes took place in army and navy training centers, where even military discipline could not always keep taut young black and white men from each other's throats. Racial fights and even lynchings occurred at several camps, as well as overseas; one squabble on Guam between Negro seamen and white marines ended in fatalities. At the army's request, the famed director Frank Capra put together a sensitively crafted film, *The Negro Soldier*, intended to alleviate racial tensions in the camps by educating blacks and whites alike about the Negro's military role, but it would take more than Capra's art to overcome racial problems in the military. Northern blacks especially resented their first encounters with formal segregation in the South. All blacks chafed at the gratuitous humiliations that military life inflicted on them—from lack of access to recreational facilities to segregated blood plasma supplies to the galling spectacle of German prisoners of war seated at southern lunch counters that refused to serve Negro soldiers. Worst of all, the army persisted in ghettoizing Negro recruits in all-black outfits and assigning them almost exclusively to noncombat roles.

Negro leaders hammered at the War and Navy departments to end segregation and train blacks for combat, but military authorities took only a few halting steps to mollify them. In 1940 Stimson appointed William Hastie, dean of Howard University's law school, as his civilian aide on Negro affairs and promoted the army's senior black officer, Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, to brigadier general. But when Hastie urged in late 1941 that a start be made toward banishing Jim Crow from the armed forces, General Marshall turned him down cold. Hastie was proposing, said Marshall, that the U.S. Army should solve "a social problem that has perplexed the American people throughout the history of this nation. . . . The Army is not a sociological laboratory."[36]

The army may not have been a sociological laboratory, but it soon generated sociological data that starkly exposed the wretched plight of black America. The Selective Service System rejected 46 percent of black registrants as unfit for service, compared with a 30.3 percent rejection rate for whites. Fully one-quarter of black inductees were infected with syphilis, a disqualification for service that ultimately was removed after treatment with sulfa drugs. Less easily remediable were educational deficiencies. In some units a third or more of black troops were illiterate. Ill-educated southern blacks scored especially poorly on the Army General Classification Test. The AGCT, often misunderstood as a general intelligence test, was instead an aptitude test designed to sort recruits into categories according to their suitability for different kinds of duty. As the army's chief psychologist carefully explained, the AGCT "reflects very definitely the educational opportunities the individual has had." Recruits who placed in Grades I, II, and III were tracked to become airmen, officers, specialists, and technicians. Those scoring in Grades IV or V were thought fit mainly for infantry duty or for common pick-and-shovel or dishwashing labor. In a disheartening demonstration of the deficiencies of the South's segregated educational system, 84 percent of blacks scored in the bottom two categories, compared to one-third of whites; almost half of blacks fell into the lowest category, Grade V, six times the rate for whites. Despite Marshall's determination not to turn the military into a social reform agency, the army was soon obliged to offer remedial instruction. By war's end it had taught more than 150,000 black recruits to read and had trained others in valuable work skills.[37]

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[36] Lee, *Employment of Negro Troops*, 140–41.

The poor qualifications of so many black soldiers reinforced the army's already considerable reluctance to send them into combat. Only two black divisions were combat-rated, and the army considered neither fully reliable. The 93rd Division faced enemy fire in the Pacific theater, but mostly in rearguard and "mopping up" operations. The ill-starred 92nd Division, its black bison insignia proudly evoking memories of the Negro "buffalo soldiers" of Indian warfare days, had been removed from the line in disgrace in World War I and continued to suffer from deep distrust between its resentful black troops and condescending white officers. In one incident, enlisted men stoned a car in which white officers were riding. Wracked by such tensions, the 92nd turned in another mixed performance in Italy. It was ultimately reconfigured to include one black and one white regiment, as well as the Japanese-American 442nd Regimental Combat Team—a dubious concession to the principle of desegregation, and one that blacks protested. A handful of other black units saw combat, including the 761st Tank Battalion, sent into battle in Normandy by George Patton with the admonition: "I don't care what color you are, so long as you go up there and kill those Kraut sonsabitches."[38]

Only in the acute manpower crisis of the Battle of the Bulge at the end of 1944 did the army form several dozen black rifle platoons to serve alongside white soldiers in integrated companies. For the most part, the two thousand black service troops who volunteered for this reassignment to combat duty performed admirably, earning the respect and gratitude of their white comrades. In 1948 President Truman at last ordered full desegregation of the armed forces.

The Army Air Corps eventually consented to take a handful of black fliers, including the 99th Pursuit Squadron, trained at the famed Tuskegee Institute founded by Booker T. Washington and known colloquially as the Tuskegee Airmen. When Eleanor Roosevelt visited the trainees in 1941 and went for a flight with Chief Alfred Anderson in a Piper Cub, the photographs were a sensation, in both the white and black press. The 99th distinguished itself in North Africa and Italy and later over Germany, though in 1943 Hastie resigned in protest over the isolation of the "Lonely Eagles" in an all-black, segregated unit. The Marine Corps began training men for its first all-Negro battalion in the summer of 1942, but they would not serve under black officers. The first Negro marine lieutenant was commissioned only after the end of the war.

As for the navy, manpower needs prompted it to step up black inductions in 1943. Most black sailors were indifferently trained and destined for unglamorous and backbreaking shore duty. The navy assigned several gangs of black stevedores to loading ammunition at its sprawling munitions depot at Port Chicago, California. Like all naval facilities, Port Chicago was rigidly segregated. Black sailors waited for white sailors to finish eating before entering the mess hall. Only black crews did the nerve-grating work of wrestling grease-slathered bombs down planks into the holds of the Liberty Ships. They were given no safety manuals or training in the handling of high explosives. "We were just shown a boxcar full of ammunition, wire nets spread out on the docks and the hold in the ship and told to load," one black winch operator remembered. White officers wagered on which crew could load the most tonnage on a shift, a practice known as "racing."

On July 17, 1944, black sailors raced through the afternoon and into the night to finish packing some forty-six hundred tons of explosives into the *E.A. Bryan*, and to rig its sister ship, the *Quinalt Victory*, to begin loading the next day. At 10:18 in the evening, a terrific blast obliterated both vessels, hurling debris thousands of feet into the air and shattering windows in San Francisco, thirty-five miles to the west. It was the worst war-related disaster in the continental United States. Flying glass and metal killed 320 men and maimed hundreds more. Of the dead, 202 were black. When the unnerved Negro survivors were ordered back to work three weeks later, fifty refused; they were court-martialed and sentenced to fifteen years hard labor and dishonorable discharge. Thurgood Marshall, chief counsel for the NAACP, declared: "This is not 50 men on trial for mutiny. This is the Navy on trial for its whole vicious policy toward Negroes. Negroes in the Navy don't mind loading ammunition. They just want to know why they are the only ones doing the loading! They want to know why they are segregated; why they don't get promoted, [and] why the Navy disregarded official warnings by the San Francisco waterfront unions . . . that an explosion was inevitable if they persisted in using untrained seamen in the loading of ammunition."

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[37] Lee Kennett, *G.I.: The American Soldier in World War II* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), 34–35: Lee, *Employment of Negro Troops*, 242–44; Stephan Thernstrom and Abigail Thernstrom, *America in Black and White* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 74. See also Samuel Stouffer et al., *The American Soldier* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949); and Paula S. Fass, *Outside In: Minorities and the Transformation of American Education* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[38] Lee, *Employment of Negro Troops*, 661.

Partly as a result of the Port Chicago catastrophe, the navy tiptoed toward integration in August 1944. It assigned some five hundred black seamen to twenty-five auxiliary vessels. Negroes were not allowed to compose more than 10 percent of a ship's crew—roughly their percentage in the general population—and the experiment went forward without incident. In December 1945 the navy ended segregation altogether, and in 1949 the first black officer graduated from the Naval Academy at Annapolis.[39]

From much of this turmoil Franklin Roosevelt remained studiously aloof. Despite his wife's evident sympathies, and whatever might have been his personal predilections, political considerations continued to stay his hand from bold racial initiatives, as they had in the New Deal years. In 1942 Eugene "Bull" Connor, the commissioner of public safety in Birmingham, Alabama, and a man destined to play a violently repressive role in the civil rights struggles two decades later, presciently warned the president that further federal pressure on the South's segregationist regime would lead to "the Annihilation of the Democratic Party in this section of the Nation." When the Supreme Court ruled in *Smith v. Allwright* in 1944 that the Democratic Party's all-white primary in Texas was unconstitutional, Attorney General Biddle wanted to go forward with a similar suit in Alabama. But an aide who sounded out southern opinion cautioned the President that Biddle's proposal "would translate impotent rumblings against the New Deal into an actual revolt at the polls. I am sure that any such action would be a very dangerous mistake." Even Eleanor Roosevelt shared her husband's wariness about the political volatility of racial issues. Responding to a young black woman's complaint that Wendell Willkie professed more advanced racial views than did the president, Eleanor wrote that Willkie enjoyed the luxury of not having to govern. "If he were to be elected President," Eleanor explained, "on that day, he would have to take into consideration the people who are heads of important committees in Congress . . . people on whom he must depend to pass vital legislation for the nation as a whole." Most of those people were southerners, and for them segregation was still a sacrosanct way of life.[40]

But however politically straitjacketed, the president found some room for maneuver on race. When it became apparent that some employers were violating the spirit of Executive Order 8802 by employing blacks only in the most menial jobs and denying them access to the kinds of training necessary for advancement, the president significantly strengthened the FEPC. In 1943 he increased its budget to half a million dollars. He replaced its part-time appointees working out of make-shift Washington quarters with a professional staff distributed through a dozen regional offices. When he learned that unions were shunting blacks into powerless "auxiliaries," he encouraged the National Labor Relations Board to decertify unions that practiced discrimination. He sent in federal troops to break a strike on the Philadelphia transit system in 1944, compelling the hiring of black trolley drivers. By war's end, blacks held some 8 percent of defense-industry jobs, a proportion that approached their presence in the population, and a major advance from the 3 percent they held in 1942. The number of African-American civilians in the federal employ more than tripled, to two hundred thousand. Among whites, meanwhile, the principle of cumulation was slowly working its effects. In 1942 three-fifths of whites told pollsters that they imagined blacks were contented with their lot. Two years later, only a quarter of whites thought that blacks were being treated fairly.[41]

~~The NAACP's Walter White returned from a tour of the fighting fronts at the war's end to publish a prophetic book: *A Rising Wind*. Echoing Myrdal, he wrote: "World War II has immeasurably magnified~~

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[39] John Boudreau, "Blown Away," *Washington Post*, July 17, 1994, sec. F, 1; Robert L. Allen, *The Port Chicago Mutiny* (New York: Warner 1989), 119–20. In 1946 the Port Chicago sailors were quietly released from prison and given less than dishonorable discharges.

[40] Blum, *V Was for Victory*, 193, 212; Doris Kearns Goodwin, *No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Homefront in World War II* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 353.

[41] Cantril, 988–89.