



The Civil Rights Movement and the Presidency in the Hot Years of the Cold War: A Historical and Historiographical Assessment

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Abstract

The two most important phenomena that the United States confronted in the quarter century after the end of World War II were the Cold War and the Civil Rights Movement. Four presidents, Harry S. Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon B. Johnson had to deal with the most critical years of both the struggle for racial justice and the challenge of Communist totalitarianism. This historiographical article seeks to situate each of these presidents within the context of the explosion of literature on the presidency and the fight for black equality and to provide suggestive assessments of these presidencies and their successes and failures in addressing black demands.

Introduction

The two forces that dominated the American landscape in the wake of the allied victory over Japanese imperialism and Nazi totalitarianism were the Cold War against the Soviet Bloc and the Civil Rights Movement against white supremacy at home. Both struck at the heart of America's value system. The Cold War starkly contrasted liberal democracy and its commitment to human rights with the totalitarianism embodied in the Stalinist Soviet Union. The Civil Rights Movement, meanwhile, demanded that America live up to the very values that Americans argued made their society superior to the Communist onslaught. If the former pitted American ideals versus those of its Cold War foes, the Civil Rights Movement forced Americans to confront the realities of those ideals on the ground in their own country.

For better or for worse, the American embodiment of its foreign policies and goals, the face that the United States presents to the world, is that of the President. In the hottest years of the Cold War, a succession of American presidents presented American ideals, stood up to the onslaught of Communist totalitarianism, struggled to contain that threat, and reassured the American people of the righteousness of their cause. During this same time, the presidency took on the (almost always) reluctant duty of addressing the increasing demand of black Americans for the country to live up to

its covenant of equality of opportunity for its citizens. While most of the presidents of the post-World War II era gladly defended liberal democracy from external threats, they at best saw the Civil Rights Movement as a distraction from their larger commitments, and at worst looked at it as a nuisance that damaged America's image in the world at a time when that image was so vital in winning hearts, minds, and alliances across the globe.

This article will explore the role of the presidency in addressing these demands for civil rights in the years ranging from Harry S. Truman's administration through Lyndon B. Johnson's tenure in office. Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson, had to face frontally the dual challenges of the Cold War and the Civil Rights Movement. The purpose here is not to attempt to reinvigorate the idea of the 'Presidential synthesis', whereby American history is best embodied in the actions of the man in the Oval Office, though political history is still vital and the Presidency will continue to draw an enormous amount of attention from historians. Rather, this article aims to show that one cannot adequately explore the Civil Rights Movement without eventually addressing questions of politics, whether within the movement, locally, at the state and regional levels, and eventually nationally. What becomes clear is that even when looking at the Civil Rights Movement from the vantage point of the highest office in the land the momentum for challenging racial equality nearly always comes from the grass roots. Far from being central actors in promoting civil rights, Presidents reacted as the result of movement activists and their supporters. But act (or choose not to act) these presidents did, for good or for ill, and it is important to continue to understand the relationship between the movement and the White House.

In an important assessment of the state of Civil Rights Movement historiography that appeared in *The Journal of Southern History* in 2000, historian Charles Eagles gave an indication of the state of the subfield and showed that while there had been an explosion of writing, many gaps remained. He compared civil rights historiography with that of the Cold War in both cases historians found themselves writing in the middle of the struggle they chronicled, which oftentimes led to a lack of detachment. But unlike Cold War historiography, the literature on the civil rights movement had not yet developed clashing schools of thought or interpretive battlefields.¹

Curiously, Eagles overlooked the growing literature on the Civil Rights Movement and the presidency. Perhaps he felt that scholarship connecting the presidency and civil rights did not represent movement history *per se*, and that such works thus fell outside of his ambit. His sole treatment of such works is brief, dismissive, and implies that they are overwhelmingly trapped in a benighted era of scholarship. Yet both historians of the movement and historians of the presidency have increasingly come together to create a growing and important literature. One of the driving forces behind this

convergence (and which largely post-dates Eagles's article) has been a profusion of works addressing the role of the Cold War in shaping race relations in the United States during the Civil Rights era.

The linkage between the Cold War and civil rights has become clearer as the result of the work of a number of historians. Most prominent and persistent among them has been Mary Dudziak, whose more than decade-long engagement with the linkages between domestic policy and the Cold War culminated in her important 2000 book, *Cold War Civil Rights*.² For Dudziak, the Cold War forced American politicians to be aware of the country's international reputation, especially when it came to winning hearts and minds in the so-called 'third world'. Nowhere was the country more vulnerable than on the issue of race – how, after all, could Americans claim to possess moral superiority over the communists in the face of some of the worst excesses of Jim Crow? The Cold War imperative thus demanded that American leaders, and especially the men in the oval office, work to present an image to the outside world that simultaneously forced them to push for peaceful resolution of the race question.³

Thomas Borstelmann's *The Cold War and the Color Line* appeared shortly after *Cold War Civil Rights*, and added a new wrinkle by also looking at America's involvement with race abroad. In both the fight against colonialism and the fight against Jim Crow, American governments were reactive. Anti-colonialists and civil rights activists set the agenda for American leaders who oftentimes would have been happy for the problem simply to have disappeared.⁴

A number of scholars have investigated the role of the presidency and civil rights during the period in question, some connecting the Cold War context more closely than others.⁵ As far back as 1972 political scientist Allan Wolk produced *The Presidency and Black Civil Rights: Eisenhower to Nixon*.⁶ Wolk concluded that in the realms of education and voting rights, the executive branch never pursued opening up opportunity particularly aggressively. Although Wolk's book is of limited utility to historians today, it reflects the early template of the image these presidents would carry forward for nearly two decades: Eisenhower disinterested, Kennedy eloquent but tragically cut short, and Johnson heroic if flawed.

By the 1990s a vast literature on civil rights had emerged, leading to an expansion of perspectives on the connection of the presidency to civil rights. Among the most provocative studies came from political scientists and policy historians engaged in the work of uncovering what presidents did and how they did it. Steven Shull's *The President and Civil Rights Policy* (1989) explores presidential leadership on the issue of civil rights with an emphasis on the years after World War II.⁷ He argues that 'committed presidents lead, and without leadership, little else happens'.⁸ Shull's work provided an admirable attempt to synthesize an important question, but, as some other works make clear, he overemphasizes the leadership role of presidents when it came to civil rights. By focusing so closely on the

presidency as an institution, Shull leaves out the historical context, within which the president was rarely the most significant actor, even if he often became among the most visible.

The estimable political historian, Hugh Davis Graham occasionally falls into the same traps as Shull. Graham's work is more enduring because the quality of his historical investigation is stronger and surer than Shull's. Graham's most significant contribution on this front is *The Civil Rights Era: Origins and Development of National Policy, 1960–1972* in which he recognizes the demand for civil rights on the part of black Americans and their allies and shows how policy elites responded to those demands.⁹ Graham's strength is in his assessment of policy. From a purely policy vantage point, Graham's contribution set a standard that few historians have approached.¹⁰ More than a decade-and-a-half after its publication, *The Civil Rights Era* stands as arguably the most vital contribution from a policy historian on the question of civil rights.¹¹

If policy matters, so too does rhetoric. A president's words can oftentimes set a mood by the way he approaches an issue. Garth Pauley's 2001 book, *The Modern Presidency & Civil Rights* tries to examine the ways in which presidential rhetoric reflected a commitment (or an aversion) to civil rights.¹² Pauley limits his discussion to one major speech each from Truman (who comes across especially well in Pauley's assessment), Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson with perfunctory analysis of Franklin Roosevelt (FDR) and a suggestive but brief discussion of Nixon.

The most ambitious attempt to synthesize the history of the presidency on matters of race and civil rights is Kenneth O'Reilly's *Nixon's Piano*.¹³ On the surface the basic argument he puts forth is unobjectionable: Over the course of American history, with scant exceptions (Abraham Lincoln and Lyndon Johnson), American presidents have fallen short on the question of race. But at least for the period that concerns this article, the assertion that most all presidents failed on questions of civil rights, that these

chief executives and their deeds and dreams on matters of race yield . . . few profiles in courage and a great many profiles of men who agonized and analyzed only in search of more perfect ways to protect slavery or Jim Crow

is unsatisfactory.¹⁴ During the Cold War, a succession of presidents with different levels of commitment to racial justice operated within a specific context both globally and at home and had to confront the black demand for civil rights. That they failed relative to an absolute moral standard may be true, but it also might not be especially enlightening, interesting, or useful. *Nixon's Piano* provides a useful primer, to be sure. But serious students of civil rights and the presidency will find O'Reilly's book to be a starting point rather than the last word on his topic.

Beyond these important starting points, there is a considerable literature on the specific presidencies under consideration, which will be the focus of the remainder of this article.

Harry S. Truman

President Harry S. Truman encountered the two issues that would define the decades following World War II: the Cold War and the Civil Rights Movement. For neither phenomenon was there a template from which he could work. As large a shadow as Franklin Roosevelt had cast, he did not, he could not, leave for his successor a plan to address a new kind of war or the uniquely intensified demand for black equality. It was up to Truman to adopt a course to address the Soviet threat and the call for civil rights. In the words of Truman's biographer, Alonzo Hamby, Truman was 'magnificently right' on both issues.¹⁵

Despite the importance of the race issue during his presidency, the earliest accounts of the Truman presidency give short shrift to the question of civil rights. Thankfully, this strange silence on Truman's civil rights policies did not endure, and by the early 1970s an emerging trend in scholarship had begun to emphasize Truman's civil rights policies. In April 1966 the Truman Library Institute for National and International Affairs sponsored a conference on the Truman era in which participants assessed work that had yet to be done and that still needed exploration. The volume that emerged from those proceedings, *The Truman Period as a Research Field*, edited by Truman scholar Richard Kirkendall, includes an essay from William C. Berman emphasizing civil rights. Berman provides a tentative assessment of Truman's policies but makes it clear that the area of civil rights represented especially fertile ground for future scholarship. Putting Berman's suggestions into practice, Monroe Billington published two articles largely sympathetic to Truman's policies in *The Journal of Negro History* in the period after 1966, kicking off a spate of research and writing on the topic.¹⁶

Three significant books on Truman and civil rights soon followed. One, Richard Dalfiume's *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces* emphasized the one area of Truman's race policies that has received a great deal of attention among historians. The second is Berman's own monograph, *The Politics of Civil Rights in the Truman Administration* and the third of these books is Donald McCoy's and Richard Ruetten's *Quest and Response*. Dalfiume takes a sympathetic view toward Truman, whom he regards as having become legitimately committed to civil rights by the time he became president. Arguably Dalfiume's largest contribution to the civil rights historiography is still largely overlooked. In an era in which historians have broken free from a narrative in which the Civil Rights Movement begins with the 1954 *Brown* decision, today's historians ought to remember that as far back as 1969 Dalfiume referred to the generation before 1954 as 'the forgotten years' of the Civil Rights Movement. Berman, meanwhile, took a more critical view of Truman in his 1970 book, which characterizes Truman's civil rights program as one driven largely, if not exclusively, by political motivations rather than by humanitarianism. McCoy and Ruetten produced what at the time was the most comprehensive treatment of the

subject, which manages to balance criticism of Truman where warranted with praise where deserved. McCoy and Ruetten make it clear that while Truman was not zealous about civil rights, he ultimately devoted himself to eradicating discrimination where he could.¹⁷

A new generation of Truman scholarship absorbed this emergent literature on Truman and race relations. Foremost among its practitioners was Alonzo Hamby, whose 1973 book *Beyond the New Deal: Harry S. Truman and American Liberalism* and 1974 Truman reader *Harry S. Truman and the New Deal*, both placed civil rights within the larger context of postwar American liberalism.¹⁸ *Beyond the New Deal* describes the evolution of liberalism during the Truman years and shows how closely linked Truman was with postwar liberalism. Civil rights played a vital role in that ascendant liberalism, and in Hamby's telling Truman took an active role and interest in the issue as early as 1946. Unlike Berman, Hamby does not reduce Truman's motivations primarily to political considerations.¹⁹ In comparison with Bernstein's and Matusow's documents collection just eight years earlier, Hamby's reader devotes one entire section out of five to the question of civil rights, including Truman's own assessment of his civil rights record during the 1952 campaign, a letter from NAACP Secretary Roy Wilkins to Truman in which Wilkins praised Truman's leadership, and excerpts from Dalfiume's and Berman's books.²⁰ Veteran journalist Robert J. Donovan similarly devoted relatively more space to the civil rights question than did his predecessors from just a few years before in his books on the Truman's presidency, *Conflict and Crisis* and *Tumultuous Years*.²¹

By the mid-1980s, civil rights played a prominent role in books on Truman's life and presidency and almost universally, that treatment was generally positive, reflecting the growing stature that Truman had earned among historians and the general public alike.²² In the early-to-mid-1990s the historical treatment of Truman reached its apogee with three celebrated works, all of which generally lauded Truman's approach to civil rights. David McCullough's celebrated, if less analytically rigorous and historically useful, *Truman* (1992); Robert Ferrell's *Harry S. Truman* (1994) which briefly stood as the finest Truman biography; and Hamby's *Man of the People* (1995), the finest biography to date.²³

A new wave of Truman-era civil rights historiography had emerged. Part of the reason for this is that historians of the Civil Rights Movement have come to understand that the traditional chronologies of the movement, which a generation of writers began with 1954 and *Brown v. Board*, were remiss. There was a movement for civil rights well before 1954 and as the new historiography grew to reflect as much, historians have looked at the Truman administration and its policies.²⁴ Another reason is that the renewed interest in Truman's presidency, and his rise to the ranks of 'great' or 'near great' in most of the popular presidential rankings systems inevitably inspired a new wave of scholars to look anew at Truman's racial policies.

Truman's desegregation of the military has continued to fascinate historians. In the early 1980s Morris MacGregor, Jr. produced a comprehensive official history of the integration of the armed forces in which he argues that politics represented but one of many factors that motivated Truman and that the President had, by the time of his announcement of Executive Order 9981, become identified with civil rights to the point where it was as much of a liability as a positive for him politically.²⁵

In 1998 Sherie Mershon and Steven Schlossman added *Foxholes and Color Lines*. They argue that Truman believed that segregation was wrong and that this was a major factor in motivating the president. They argue that while Truman shared most of the racial views of his native border state of Missouri, he clearly and consistently threw his weight behind anti-discrimination efforts and he progressed on racial matters over the course of his public life.²⁶

The most significant comprehensive treatment of Truman and the question of black rights since Berman's work has been Michael Gardner's 2002 book *Harry Truman and Civil Rights*. Gardner categorizes Truman's record as far superior to those of FDR, Eisenhower, or Kennedy. Gardner shows how the Supreme Court under Chief Justice Frederick Moore Vinson, which Truman had helped to shape, paved the way for the more celebrated Warren Court. If Gardner goes too far in maintaining that African American civil rights activists placed Truman in the company of Mahatma Gandhi and Abraham Lincoln – he makes a pretty strong case for Truman's willingness to pursue his civil rights agenda in an era when to do so put his political fortunes at risk²⁷

To summarize Truman's civil rights record requires significant context. More than any other president under discussion in this article, Truman acted without the significant cover of a clear mandate to act. Unlike his successors, he did not operate under the Supreme Court's unanimous *Brown* decision declaring 'separate but equal' null and void. He also faced hostile members of his own party – many of whom showed a clear willingness to abandon him during his ferocious 1948 re-election campaign. He used the power of the presidency to put civil rights on the agenda by establishing his Presidential Commission, which in turn issued 'To Secure These Rights', the most ardent and thorough declaration for black rights put forth by a president on the matter of civil rights in American history.²⁸ He fought with the legislature unsuccessfully to have the Fair Employment Practices Committee extended soon after taking over the presidency, and while political realities scuttled most of the suggestions in 'To Secure These Rights', Truman had nonetheless acted in ways that surpassed his predecessors in the office, but also, as we shall see, proved more asserting and daring than almost all of his successors.

Truman's greatest legacies in civil rights came with his ability to act in an executive capacity without the imprimatur of a Congress that was largely hostile or apathetic to civil rights. In addition to his precedent-setting

appointments, Truman also put forth two vital executive orders. Executive Order 9980, Regulations Governing Fair Employment Practices Within the Federal Establishment, which he announced on July 27, 1948, ‘explicitly mandated the elimination of discriminatory practices throughout the federal government based on race, color, religion, or national origin’.²⁹ More famously, Executive Order 9981, which Truman had issued a day later, ordered the integration of the armed services. While this order would not reach fruition for a few years, it nonetheless was the most controversial act regarding civil rights of his presidency.

Harry S. Truman accomplished more on civil rights in an era and political climate when he reasonably could have been expected to do less. He took significant political risks even if those risks were calculated and even if he also anticipated political gains. It is little wonder, therefore, that William Leuchtenberg, in his magisterial *The White House Looks South*, celebrates Truman’s civil rights evolution.³⁰ Whatever his personal limitations, when Truman returned home after his presidency, Leuchtenberg writes,

he had the satisfaction of knowing that he had placed civil rights irrevocably on the national agenda, had reconfigured America’s election maps and had set in motion a chain of events that made the greater achievements of the 1960s possible.³¹

The vast and growing literature on the Truman years makes clear that Alonzo Hamby’s assertion stands: on civil rights Truman was ‘magnificently right’.

Dwight D. Eisenhower

Eisenhower’s circumstance was quite the opposite of Truman’s. Much like the early treatments of Truman, the first wave of books on Eisenhower deemphasized civil rights when they recognized the issue at all.³² Among the early interlocutors of Eisenhower’s legacy, Arthur Larson provides the most clearcut assessment of Eisenhower’s civil rights legacy. Larson was far from an objective observer.³³ He served in the Eisenhower administration as Undersecretary of Labor, director of the United States Information Agency, and as Eisenhower’s Executive Assistant to the President for Speeches. Larson’s stated goal was to challenge prevailing opinions that Eisenhower’s presidency was a disaster and that Eisenhower was a weak leader.³⁴

Larson reveals that whatever Eisenhower said after the fact, he felt that the *Brown* decision had been wrongly decided. Larson was one of many lawyers in the White House who advocated for a broader conception of the Presidential role on civil rights, and he may well have helped facilitate Eisenhower’s change of heart in later years. He concluded that Eisenhower’s ‘personal attitudes may have been mistaken – or, perhaps more accurately, not sufficiently attuned to the demands of the times nor sufficiently sensitive to the scope of the racial revolution that was gaining momentum’.³⁵ But, according to Larson, Eisenhower’s inaction should not be confused with

indifference: ‘President Eisenhower, during his presidential tenure, was neither emotionally nor intellectually in favor of combating segregation in general’, though the President did act where he felt that he had ‘special legal responsibility’.³⁶ Eisenhower might have been wrong, but he was not wrong because he was weak.

Peter Lyon similarly casts Eisenhower as a reluctant warrior on the civil rights question.³⁷ Lyon depicts Eisenhower as continuing to think fundamentally as a soldier. Thus when the *Brown* decision came down, ‘The soldier had been given his orders. Whether he approved of them or not was irrelevant. He would obey’.³⁸ Lyon indicates that both personally and philosophically, the President was not committed to racial justice in any meaningful way. ‘Emancipation’, Lyon argues, ‘awaited a President more deeply stirred by the denial of human rights’.³⁹

Before long scholarly literature would begin to take on both critical engagement with and critical distance from the administration. Charles Alexander produced the first of such assessments in *Holding the Line* .⁴⁰ Alexander argues that the administration sought to ‘hold the line’ against Communism and the threat of the Soviet Union, but it was an approach that Eisenhower used on the issue of race relations as well. Alexander shows how Eisenhower acted cautiously, displaying ‘little interest in using his powers to enforce the Court’s wishes’ after *Brown*. Ultimately Alexander sees in Eisenhower a ‘lack of Presidential leadership’ on civil rights.⁴¹ Eisenhower did work to desegregate the schools in Washington, DC, and Alexander gives him credit for his role in securing passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1957, and believes that while Little Rock was foisted upon him, Eisenhower acted ‘publicly and forcefully’ in resolving that situation.⁴² But by the end of his administration black Americans ‘had only managed to pry the door to full citizenship; they had still not got through that door’.⁴³

In 1982, Fred Greenstein published one of the most significant revisionist works on Presidential politics in American scholarship.⁴⁴ Greenstein addresses one of the prevailing views of Eisenhower – that he was a genial, bumbling leader who lacked interest in the details of the every-day workings of the presidency. Instead, Greenstein argues, Eisenhower operated with a ‘hidden hand’ in which he took on a public persona that belied his attention to policy detail and his deep immersion in the issues of the day. The significance and strength of this argument makes its silence on civil rights so flabbergasting. The *Brown* decisions, the Montgomery Bus Boycott (and other similar events), the University of Alabama riots, Little Rock, the passage of the 1957 Civil Rights Act, and myriad other struggles for racial justice made it clear that by the mid-1950s civil rights represented the single most pressing domestic issue in American life. Yet in Greenstein’s assessment of Eisenhower’s leadership style, civil rights, the issue about which historians seem to have reached a consensus that Eisenhower came up short, are invisible. Greenstein’s index makes not a single reference to ‘civil rights’, ‘blacks’, ‘Negroes’, ‘Faubus, Orval’, ‘integration’, ‘desegregation’, ‘Little Rock’, ‘*Brown v. Board*

of *Education*', or any other issue or individual related to civil rights. The only reference to Earl Warren comes in passing on an issue unrelated to race. This shortcoming seriously mars an otherwise impressive book.

In 1983 and 1984 Stephen Ambrose published his two-volume biography of Eisenhower, a work of scholarship that still stands as arguably the finest biographical work on Eisenhower and his career.⁴⁵ Ambrose genuinely admires Eisenhower as a man and a historical figure. Like Greenstein, he argues that Eisenhower was in control of policy in his White House, and 'clearly . . . was doing something right'.⁴⁶ But on civil rights, Ambrose sees Eisenhower's record as at best a mixed bag and oftentimes as falling short. Eisenhower, in this estimation, took a 'tepid approach to civil-rights questions'. As a result, school desegregation had been slow to nonexistent, the Civil Rights Acts had been largely ineffectual, blacks had made almost no progress on voting rights issues, and Jim Crow prevailed in public accommodations. Though the President had ample opportunities to speak out for civil rights or against segregation, he refused to do so. Ambrose contends that Eisenhower personally loathed violations of civil rights, especially those that came in the form of violence, but such violations still did not motivate him to act. Anticipating the arguments Mary Dudziak would make a generation later, Ambrose argued that Eisenhower's chief concern on the race front was what confrontations did to America's image abroad.⁴⁷ Even on matters such as the Civil Rights Act of 1957, which Eisenhower had promoted, he showed remarkable ignorance of the provisions of the final act and what it might mean up to the eve of its passage. Ambrose argues that this ignorance meant that Southern Senators in particular could fiddle with and water down the act with little fear of presidential intervention.⁴⁸

In 1979 Elmo Richardson published the Eisenhower volume of the Regents Press of Kansas' American Presidency Series.⁴⁹ Richardson gives more credit to Eisenhower's civil rights record than many historians without exactly endorsing Eisenhower's record.⁵⁰ In 1991 the University Press of Kansas released a revised edition of *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower* with Chester Pach added as Richardson's co-author.⁵¹ This much-improved volume is more skeptical of Eisenhower's accomplishments in that arena than Richardson's original book. Pach and Richardson begin by explaining that Eisenhower's approach to civil rights was contradictory. He asserted that he desired equality, yet he demanded gradualism from black leaders. He proved sympathetic to white Southern segregationists and branded black leaders who challenged the status quo as extremists. His actions proved 'more symbolic than substantive'. In sum, 'Civil rights . . . revealed more dramatically than any other issue the shortcomings of Eisenhower's philosophy of governmental restraint'.⁵² They echo Arthur Larson's assertions about Eisenhower's fundamental lack of commitment to the civil rights question.⁵³

The Warren Court largely set the agenda on race in the 1950s. The court's decision in *Brown*, for which Warren had written the unanimous majority

opinion, provided opportunities on civil rights that no president prior to Eisenhower had faced. Eisenhower's shortcomings in light of the court's imprimatur for action are particularly stark. The literature on the *Brown* case is extensive, with a few works standing out. Richard Kluger's masterful 1976 book *Simple Justice* still stands as the definitive work on *Brown v. Board of Education*.⁵⁴ Kluger argues that Eisenhower ranged from indifference to hostility to the Supreme Court's decision. He also blames the administration for not doing more:

If Dwight Eisenhower and Richard Nixon had used the power of the White House to insist that the nation meet its moral obligation to black Americans, racism in the nation may long since have become a fugitive.⁵⁵

In Kluger's estimation, they did not use the power that the Supreme Court gave them in their epochal decision. Jack Greenberg, former Director-Counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, wrote an extensive memoir about the lawyers of the civil rights era. In *Crusaders in the Courts* he too takes a dim view of the Eisenhower's approach to civil rights.⁵⁶ James Patterson's recent book on *Brown* reinforces Eisenhower's timidity, pointing out that Eisenhower never supported the Supreme Court's decision and took a 'decidedly cool approach to desegregation of the races'.⁵⁷ Michael Klarman's vital *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights* echoes the assessments of Eisenhower as a cautious moderate who sought gradualism and displayed little commitment to civil rights.⁵⁸

James Duram's *A Moderate among Extremists* did little to modify the prevailing view that Eisenhower had little inclination toward taking the lead on civil rights, or even of following the clearly emerging movement with decisive action.⁵⁹ Duram paints Eisenhower as consistent and measured and depicts Eisenhower's attempts at moderation, noting how deeply unsatisfying this was for proponents of civil rights. Robert Frederick Burk's *The Eisenhower Administration and Civil Rights* still stands as arguably the single-most important assessment of Eisenhower's record on this issue. In it Burk reinforced and strengthened the view of Eisenhower as largely unconcerned with acting on the civil rights question.⁶⁰ Despite some progress over the course of the 1950s, 'Eisenhower and his subordinates had displayed a consistent pattern of hesitancy and extreme political caution in defending black civil rights', and 'much of the blame for the administration's excessive caution lay squarely with the president himself'.⁶¹ Burk explains that Eisenhower contributed rhetorical support for civil rights that he failed to bolster with substantial or meaningful initiatives and that he reacted when forced to do so. The administration placed its faith in democratic institutions without ensuring those institutions could accomplish what Eisenhower hoped that they would.

Subsequent historians have buttressed Burk's account. Kenneth O'Reilly has asserted that Eisenhower 'preferred the late nineteenth century racial model to the midtwentieth', and that he was 'utterly convinced that his nation

had been blessed by *Plessy* and cursed by *Brown*, an assertion that smacks more of rhetorical excess than reasoned scholarly analysis.⁶² Mary Dudziak and Thomas Borstelmann show an Eisenhower far more concerned with the effect civil rights tensions would have on the American image abroad than he was with the racial problems at home, though Dudziak points out that when pushed Eisenhower reacted strongly, as at Little Rock.⁶³ Borstelmann is especially scathing toward Eisenhower on the question of race.⁶⁴

Eisenhower is not without his defenders. Foremost among these has been Michael Mayer. Mayer has provided a useful corrective to some of the most hostile views of Eisenhower without stripping away the reality of Eisenhower's general inaction on the issue. Mayer argues:

Eisenhower's response to the issue of civil rights demonstrates the dominance that he exercised over policy within his administration and the political maneuvering with which he sought to implement his policies. A careful examination of his handling of civil rights also destroys forever the neat lines of traditional historiography, which glorifies the contributions of Harry S. Truman and John F. Kennedy and portrays Eisenhower's two terms as an intervening period of quiescence. Neither, do the facts indicate that Eisenhower was an unequivocal advocate of racial equality.⁶⁵

While the assertion of a historiography 'glorifying' Truman is dubious and, as we shall see, any glorification of Kennedy is problematic, Mayer attempts to show how Eisenhower accomplished more than most historians have credited. Mayer's greatest contribution is to accomplish where Fred Greenstein demonstrably failed – to bring civil rights into the revisionist discussion and to show how whatever Eisenhower's failures or successes on civil rights, as in other areas, Eisenhower was centrally involved. Mayer's argument that Eisenhower proceeded 'with much deliberation and some speed' has merits, but elides the question, both moral and historical, of whether more speed and less deliberation was called for by the post-*Brown* period.⁶⁶

In *Turn Away thy Son*, Elizabeth Jacoway provides the best treatment we have of the integration crisis at Little Rock.⁶⁷ What is striking is how relatively absent Eisenhower is from the bulk of the book, but also how relatively colorless he seems. Jacoway comes not to bury Eisenhower, and certainly not to praise him, yet the entire tenor of her book presents a President disengaged on the most vital moral issue before him who finally attacked the issue as a problem to be solved, a crisis to be managed, a compromise to be found, and not as an opportunity to attack the issue where America fell so short of its creed.

Furthermore, the Eisenhower years saw slow but discernible advancement of civil rights, even if little of the impetus came from Eisenhower. The President quite clearly did not embrace the *Brown* decision, but he believed in the rule of law and however reticently, he enforced its mandates during the Little Rock crisis. Eisenhower was active in shaping the Civil Rights Acts

of 1957 and 1960. He helped to demand the integration of Washington DC. He ardently hoped that the civil rights question would be resolved without violence and without bringing shame to a country he loved.

Some of Eisenhower's defenders have depicted Eisenhower as caught between two extremes, with him the moderate in between. But this image only works if one concludes that Eisenhower took a middle ground between two equally extreme poles. Eisenhower tried to stake a middle ground between those who called for civil rights and those who called for sustaining Jim Crow and for massive resistance. Eisenhower, in short, tried to paint a picture in which the Citizens Councils and the Congress of Racial Equality shared moral equivalence. The presupposition that moderation represented a middle ground marked a moral and intellectual failing that tainted Eisenhower's approach to civil rights.

Arguably Eisenhower's greatest failing is that he operated within a political climate in which he could have done more. Where Truman acted knowing that he would raise the ire of a vast number of important members of his own party and a region that had been solidly Democratic for a century, Eisenhower could have led the Republican Party as the party of civil rights. Where Truman risked losing his own supporters, Eisenhower largely ran the risk of losing Democrats whose support for him was already lost. Furthermore, Eisenhower operated throughout almost all of his tenure in office under the penumbra of the *Brown* decision. He had Constitutional protections to act, under the mandate of the Supreme Court, which his predecessors could not claim. In short, he could have and should have done more to advance the cause of black equality, but he chose not to, deferring the dream for the future, a future that at the time seemed a long way away for those living under Jim Crow.

John F. Kennedy

Perhaps no president in American history had the benefit of so many writers who ended up as court historians. Within months of Kennedy's assassination, insiders' accounts began to emerge, all of them sympathetic, and all of them destined to set the tone of perceptions of the Kennedy administration for more than a generation. These contemporary accounts coupled with the so-called posthumous landslide that Kennedy enjoyed in the public realm gave Kennedy a historical aura that lingers to this day. On civil rights, Kennedy's lingering popular reputation is overstated if not utterly misleading. While sympathetic to the plight of America's black population, Kennedy was no crusader. He had his eyes firmly set on foreign affairs and the Cold War. Civil rights represented a distraction.

Personally, Kennedy may well have been more committed to the idea of racial justice than either Truman or Eisenhower. Unlike Truman, he was unwilling, rhetoric aside, to take significant stands on the issue without prodding. Politics mattered too much to Kennedy. Like Eisenhower, he

largely wished the issue would go away and acted tepidly even when given a clear mandate to act. Unlike Eisenhower, however, Kennedy appeared to develop on the issue of racial equality as his administration developed. By 1963 and the monstrosities of the Birmingham Campaign, Kennedy had begun to pursue serious civil rights legislation. Kennedy's record in civil rights was more a matter of promise than accomplishment, more hope than consummation. It is not that Kennedy was a failure on civil rights but rather that he owes his reputation to what people assumed he might have done rather than what he actually did.

The recently departed Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. set the tone with his Pulitzer Prize-winning *A Thousand Days*.⁶⁸ Masterfully written but clearly the work of a devoted insider, *A Thousand Days* carried with it the imprimatur of professional history and captured the wave of sentiment and instant revisionism that followed Kennedy's death. Schlesinger is actually more clear-eyed about Kennedy's civil rights record than some might expect given the book's reputation, but ultimately does cast Kennedy's record positively, even if he seems to wish that the President had acted more forcefully. Schlesinger explained presidential inaction by blaming it on the context within which Kennedy operated. In essence, Schlesinger depicts a young president coming to grips with an issue for which he was largely unprepared and eventually ending up on the right side.

Theodore Sorenson, who resided far deeper within Kennedy's inner circle, offered no such nuance in his assessment of Kennedy's record on civil rights in his 1965 book *Kennedy*.⁶⁹ At times Sorenson's account fairly gushes. He acknowledges that Kennedy did not really come around until 1963, but by that date Sorenson was willing to grant his former boss a status alongside Lincoln when it came to racial liberation. Sorenson depicts Kennedy as a crusader for civil rights who acted bravely in the face of opposition and who risked his own presidency for the cause of racial equality.

Harris Wofford's own insider account of the sixties is more measured than Sorenson's but still is a memoir, not a work of scholarly history, and lacks Schlesinger's scholarly nuance.⁷⁰ Wofford argues that Kennedy fit in with 'the whole civil rights movement'.⁷¹ This is a generous accounting that fits into the early wave of Kennedy's admirers.

Kennedy's biographers have increasingly emphasized Kennedy's record on civil rights. Herbert Parmet argued in 1983 that Kennedy probably would have been pleased 'had the drive for a 'second reconstruction' not emerged' during his brief tenure. Parmet grasped the key paradox of Kennedy's approach to civil rights. In the minds of some, Kennedy's rhetoric and responses to crises elevated him to 'Lincolnesque proportions'. But in reality 'the drive for racial equality overwhelmed him, forced him to amend his political calculations, and weakened the pragmatic coalition he had been working to harmonize'.⁷²

In a book published a year after Parmet's, David Burner and Thomas R. West hint at this paradox but with somewhat more charitable conclusions.

In their rendering, Kennedy publicly but cautiously allied the US government and especially the presidency behind the civil rights movement. The President ‘gave the cause a look of legitimacy, of being within the inevitable flow of American history’. Furthermore ‘the general feeling of energy and electricity and challenge that attended the Kennedy presidency made a further, intangible contribution to the struggle for civil rights’.⁷³

Thomas Reeves caused a stir with his 1992 *A Question of Character*, which emphasized issues of Kennedy’s personal, sometimes prurient, conduct. For Reeves matters of character and principles determined the Kennedy approach to racial equality. Despite the president’s rhetorical support,

the Kennedys failed to initiate or achieve any significant or lasting progress in this critical area of American life for the basic reason that, being pragmatic politicians primarily interested in winning and maintaining political power, they put votes ahead of principles.⁷⁴

In Richard Reeves’s 1993 history of the Kennedy administration, readers see a President concerned about the moral issue of segregation, but too often concerned with the pace of change black leaders advocated. The Kennedy who emerges is annoyed with the intransigence of Southerners and almost equally annoyed with civil rights leaders whom Kennedy saw as doing damage to America’s image abroad and making his life more difficult at home. Reeves depicts Kennedy as slow to embrace civil rights in any meaningful way, but who, when pushed, reacted. Reeves believes that Kennedy thrived on chaos and used it as a means to act.⁷⁵

Arguably the finest of the Kennedy biographies is Robert Dallek’s *An Unfinished Life*, which presents Kennedy’s accomplishments in the civil rights arena (and much of his domestic agenda) as ‘distinctly limited’. He was ‘a cautious leader’ who, ‘despite Executive Orders and federal lawsuits opposing southern segregation . . . was slow to recognize the extent of the social revolution’ that the Civil Rights Movement embodied. Furthermore, Kennedy was too willing to defer ‘to southern sensitivities on racial matters, including appointment of segregationist judges’. Although the several crises that he confronted led him ‘to put a landmark civil rights bill before Congress’, he was still ‘willing to weaken its provisions to win approval from an unreceptive Congress’.⁷⁶ Despite his cautious approach and the fact that Kennedy was unable to get Congress to pass any of his major legislative proposals, ‘all of his significant reform proposals . . . came to fruition under Lyndon Johnson’. While Johnson deserves credit for this legislation, Dallek argues that ‘part of Kennedy’s legacy should be an understanding the he proposed major domestic reforms that have had an enduring constructive impact on the country’.⁷⁷

There is a massive literature specifically emphasizing civil rights during the Kennedy years. On the Kennedy Justice Department, and particularly the role of Bobby Kennedy, Victor Navasky’s *Kennedy Justice* is a useful, if dated, account.⁷⁸ Navasky argues that ‘the popular impression is that the

brothers Kennedy . . . gently but firmly ordered and edged the FBI into the war against discrimination'. But

the fact is that not only did the Kennedys not volunteer the FBI for arduous civil rights duty, but Robert Kennedy, who was ahead of his brother in these things, himself required a few years of on-the-job sensitivity training before he caught up with the NAACP.

This training finally caught up to Kennedy with the events of 1963.⁷⁹

Many early scholars bought into the idea of Kennedy as a civil rights crusader. In a 1963 article in *Phylon* Robert Steamer praises Kennedy's activism on the issue.⁸⁰ Steamer argued that Kennedy and his 'administrative spokesmen' had 'created a new mood which at the moment is primarily qualitative, but which will eventually have its quantitative effect on the Negro community'.⁸¹ The President had more work to do, but Steamer was confident that Kennedy would accomplish his activist agenda, which Steamer argued surpassed the record of all of his predecessors.

James Harvey's *Civil Rights during the Kennedy Administration*, represented the first scholarly book to examine this issue fully. Harvey argued that Kennedy 'changed the image of the presidency from a position of seeming neutrality on civil rights . . . to one of positive actions on behalf of the frustrated blacks'.⁸²

Carl Brauer's *John F. Kennedy and the Second Reconstruction* long stood as the most comprehensive scholarly work on Kennedy's civil rights program. Written in a time before what E. Culpepper Clark called the 'thorough debunking' of Kennedy and civil rights, Brauer is largely laudatory of Kennedy, whom he identifies as 'the key political figure in the development of a Second Reconstruction'.⁸³ Brauer also argues that Kennedy 'initiated a far-reaching program of executive action to combat discrimination' and that the justice Department in particular 'marked an especially significant departure from the usual indifference of the past'. When 'social protest erupted in the spring of 1963, President Kennedy launched a drive for what was eventually to become the nation's most comprehensive piece of civil rights legislation'.⁸⁴ Although Brauer is not uncritical, his conclusion that Kennedy 'both encouraged and responded to black aspirations and led the nation into the second reconstruction' is inadequate in its understanding of the importance of movement politics, of Kennedy's own internal resistance as well as that of his administration, and of the way in which many of the seminal events of the movement under Kennedy's watch actually played themselves out.⁸⁵

Brauer's book stands as perhaps the last defense of Kennedy before a deluge of revisionists took to deconstructing the slain President's legacy, a trend that began in the early 1970s. In a 1979 article John Hart wrote that the 'instant history of the sixties', embodied in works such as Arthur Schlesinger's *A Thousand Days* and Theodore Sorenson's *Kennedy* 'g(ave) way to the instant revisionism of the seventies' in which Kennedy received

‘distinctly unfavourable press’.⁸⁶ Hart writes that he does not share Brauer’s conclusion that Kennedy ‘led America into its second Reconstruction’ but he does commend Brauer’s ‘otherwise excellent study’. He argues that ‘the revisionist treatment’ does injustice ‘to the reality of the situation’.⁸⁷ Examples of this revisionism include Henry Fairlee’s *The Kennedy Promise*, Lewis Paper’s *The Promise and the Performance*, and particularly Bruce Miroff’s scathing *Pragmatic Illusions*.⁸⁸ All of these condemn Kennedy with what would become the standard critiques: He was too committed to politics, was slow and timid on initiating civil rights policies, was too cautious, too elite, or just too apathetic about civil rights.

Hart argues that Kennedy

did not promise as much as some claim he did; that it would be better to judge his performance against those commitments that he actually made; that his assumptions about Congressional reaction to civil rights legislation seem to have been correct and that inappropriate notions of Presidential leadership are not the most fruitful basis for historical analysis.⁸⁹

Implicit in Hart’s argument is that aggressive action on Kennedy’s part for such legislation could scuttle his entire domestic program and hopelessly deadlock Congress over the race issue.

Mark Stern also examines Kennedy’s (and Johnson’s) approach to legislative issues in his 1992 book *Calculating Visions*.⁹⁰ Stern argues that ‘continuity and caution . . . reflect the Kennedy administration’s approach to civil rights in general and civil rights legislation in particular’. He asserts that Kennedy had made a number of pledges regarding civil rights in his campaign but once he entered office he ‘felt that he could not move to fulfill his pledge for civil rights legislation’ because Southerners controlled most of the major congressional committees and Kennedy believed that ‘they would defeat any proposal his administration would bring forward as well as wreck havoc on the rest of his program in retaliation for his support of civil rights’. Kennedy also felt that he had no mandate to act on civil rights legislation. Nonetheless, despite his caution, ‘the conversion of’ Kennedy and Johnson’s ‘strategic needs with the needs of the civil rights movement’ led both men to become more committed to civil rights.⁹¹

Taylor Branch, in his three-volume biography of Martin Luther King, Jr., argues that any favorable reputation Kennedy has gotten from history on civil rights rightfully belongs to King. Branch asserts in *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years* (1988) that

in death, the late President gained credit for much of the purpose that King’s movement had forced upon him in life. . . . In a mass purgative of hatred, bigotry, and violence, the martyred President became a symbol of the healing opposites, King’s qualities, which had been much too earnest for the living man.

Branch argues that Kennedy’s death ‘marked the arrival of the freedom surge’ that would abate upon the death of King four years later. This credit

belonged not to Kennedy in life, however, but to the status conferred on him by his death.⁹²

In between the various schools of thought on Kennedy stands the view of William Chafe, who takes a perspective that many historians have since accepted. Chafe argues that ‘by 1963’ Kennedy ‘had taken action in a number of areas that justified historians in seeing’ him ‘as a pathbreaker in’ civil rights. Chafe argues that ‘the problem . . . is not with eventual perception but with the corollary assumption that Kennedy was the leader, the initiator, the active hero, if you will, in these developments’. Chafe instead argued that

for the most part he was a reactor in these areas; that for reasons of political pragmatism, as well as ideological conviction, he chose not to initiate significant legislative or executive changes on civil rights . . . and that in the end, his decisive breakthroughs . . . were forced upon him by the collective and dramatic force of social movements from below.⁹³

Chafe’s assessment is broadly similar to Taylor Branch’s. However, Chafe is kinder to Kennedy, is willing to give him credit for reacting the way that he did, and asserts that

in the end, Kennedy chose the path of leadership, yet he had done so only because he was compelled to take that role by the massive movement for black civil rights that refused to be ‘handled’, and that insisted on placing the issue of race at the top of the American domestic political agenda.⁹⁴

Although some of the work that emerged in the next decade would challenge Chafe’s argument in numerous ways, versions of the image of Kennedy as ‘reactor’ have become part of the standard historiography on Kennedy and civil rights. What is important, however, is the context of events, how and indeed if the President reacted, and how effective those reactions were in accomplishing the goals of the various interests involved.

Irving Bernstein’s 1991 book *Promises Kept* represented an effort to debunk the debunkers. An assessment of the domestic facets of Kennedy’s presidency, Bernstein’s book has a simple thesis: ‘the naked conclusion is that he was a very successful President, that the revisionists were dead wrong’. Irving’s argument regarding Kennedy and civil rights is that ‘he had begun his presidency with a policy of executive action now and legislative action later’, based on a ‘political judgment’ that a civil rights bill ‘would divide the country, shatter the Democratic party, and be rejected by Congress’. Bernstein argues that ‘this reasoning, while morally questionable, was politically unassailable. Thus, the Kennedy administration devoted two years to pushing civil rights without turning to Congress’ and then it was the confrontation with George Wallace in Tuscaloosa that convinced Kennedy of the necessity to push for strong civil rights legislation, a cause to which Kennedy was committed, according to Bernstein, who acknowledges that Kennedy expected a long fight in the Senate, and that Lyndon Johnson’s political skill likely pushed the bill through faster than Kennedy might have been able to do.⁹⁵

Given the general tenor of Kenneth O'Reilly's work on presidents and civil rights, it is unsurprising that he takes a critical view of the Kennedy efforts with regard to race relations. What is surprising is that O'Reilly is kinder toward Kennedy than many of the revisionists, and than he is toward most of the other presidents on whom he focuses. O'Reilly gives Kennedy credit for acting. And his instincts 'were on the side of angels'. But wherever his instincts sat, Kennedy 'followed more often than he led'. In the Kennedy years, 'reform was orchestrated primarily by the civil rights movement and not the Oval Office'.⁹⁶

John F. Kennedy embodied the Cold War President. More concerned with foreign affairs than with civil rights, Kennedy found most domestic events to be an intrusion on the important work of foreign affairs. Thus when civil rights did force themselves into his purview Kennedy's first thought was often what effect visible confrontations might have on America's image abroad.

Mary Dudziak's work on the interplay of the Cold War and civil rights emphasizes that while 'civil rights reform was not a high priority' when Kennedy took office, and while he was even at times 'weak on civil rights', he made a name for himself that redounded to his benefit among African Americans with his support for African independence movements. But because of the increased connection between foreign affairs and domestic issues, as time passed 'civil rights was . . . not a distraction from the president's other objectives. Instead it was "the third leg of the stool"'.⁹⁷ Thomas Borstelmann similarly sees a Kennedy who oftentimes acted on civil rights as much for international consumption as for domestic accomplishment but who grew into a deeper commitment for civil rights from the time he was a candidate for the Democratic nomination up to his death. Nonetheless, he 'found himself increasingly alienated from elements on both' sides of 'the growing racial divide in the South, even as he committed himself to ending racial discrimination in the United States'.⁹⁸

In recent years historians have again taken a more critical view of the Kennedy administration and civil rights, revealing that Kennedy's civil rights legacy will continue to be highly contested terrain built on shifting sands. Dean Kotlowski, for instance, has argued that on the issue of school integration, far from being a president who grew steadily while in office, Kennedy chose continual avoidance of the issue with few signs of growth.⁹⁹ Recent work on the Freedom Rides has shown that Kennedy too often proved himself willing to compromise morally, reluctant to take the sort of action that would be needed to ensure that civil rights would come to pass, and woefully unprepared to make the tough decisions required until after events overcame him.¹⁰⁰

The most recent critical work on Kennedy and Civil Rights is also the most-in depth. In his book *The Bystander: John F. Kennedy and the Struggle For Black Equality* Nick Bryant explores Kennedy's approach to race relations not only during his brief presidency, but also during his years in Congress

and the Senate.¹⁰¹ Bryant depicts Kennedy as willing to address those problems that entered clearly into view, but that his preference was too often to ignore or overlook those issues that entered his peripheral vision. While Bryant praises Robert Kennedy's outlook on race relations, he believes that John Kennedy was timid not merely because of his sense of political realities, but because of his own temperament and disinclination toward challenging powerful Southern politicians directly. Bryant too often engages in counterfactual history, proposing what could have happened had Kennedy acted more aggressively on civil rights, but his book still stands as the latest and arguably the most rigorous example of debunking the Camelot myth, at least with regard to Civil Rights.¹⁰²

The emergence of the Civil Rights Tapes from the Presidential Recordings Project at the Miller Center of Public Affairs at the University of Virginia has revealed to civil rights historians that there is still more to be known about the 36th President, though what such sources mean will continue to be the source of highly charged historical debates.¹⁰³ Perhaps Kennedy's represents the most contested presidency of the Cold War era because he served as a fulcrum between the forces preaching moderation and those who desired more aggressive action. Events drove Kennedy more than he drove them, and while his administration ultimately pushed civil rights forward, if reluctantly at first, more than his predecessors, by the time he fully enjoined the issue events were moving more rapidly than most any president could marshal. It would take a man with a true commitment to racial justice from the beginning of his administration, coupled with an understanding of the pace of events, fully to grasp the reins of leadership that the White House offered. That man would come not from a border state like Missouri or Kansas, or from liberal Massachusetts. That man, Lyndon Baines Johnson, would come from deep in the heart of Texas.

Lyndon Baines Johnson

Lyndon Johnson was no bystander. This much is clear. Every other president in this article caviled as much as he acted forcefully. Johnson acted more than he caviled. Consequently, LBJ goes down as the president with the most celebrated record on issues of civil rights and most historians and journalists place him on a par with Lincoln on matters of race even as most wonder what more he might have accomplished had it not been for the Vietnam War that scuttled the Great Society and his once-flourishing presidency. Even Kenneth O'Reilly, who seems almost preternaturally disposed toward hostility toward presidents on the issue of race relations titles his chapter on Johnson in *Nixon's Piano* 'Brave Knight'.¹⁰⁴

By their very nature presidential memoirs are selective and self-justifying. Nonetheless, in Johnson's *The Vantage Point* he makes clear the importance he felt civil rights carried as he took the Oval Office after Kennedy's assassination. 'I knew that, as President and as a man, I would use every ounce

of strength I possessed to gain justice for the black American'. Although he recognized that he lacked a clear mandate to act forcefully, 'I recognized that the moral force of the Presidency is often stronger than the political force'.¹⁰⁵

The early wave of Johnson literature reflects that contemporary observers recognized that Johnson had committed himself to using the presidency as a force for change on civil rights. Rowland Evans and Robert Novak show the President's dedication, especially to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965, in their 1966 treatment of Johnson.¹⁰⁶ This landmark legislation has rightfully continued to occupy center stage when historians have conveyed the drama of the Johnson years.

The historian Eric F. Goldman's 1969 book *The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson* represented the reflections of a man who, like Arthur Schlesinger, served the Johnson administration as a 'Special Consultant' until his 1966 resignation. Goldman shows a Johnson whose promise – as largely embodied in his work on civil rights – gave way to the tragedy of the Vietnam War.¹⁰⁷ Goldman's narrative would become a familiar one.

Doris Kearns Goodwin served as a special adviser to LBJ and seemed particularly taken in by her role as a confidante of the President, and her *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* is not a deeply analytical work. Nonetheless, based largely on her personal observations Goodwin concludes that with regard to civil rights (and, tellingly, to Vietnam as well) 'Johnson was a true believer, although with a far more lucid sense of the human and political realities'.¹⁰⁸

Johnson's presidency has inspired a number of capable biographers. Robert Caro has long been at work on a four-volume biography of Lyndon Johnson, of which three volumes have appeared. Caro's treatment of Johnson seemed almost unremittingly hostile in the first two volumes, which carry Johnson's life and career through 1948. The third volume, *Master of the Senate*, shows Caro warming toward his subject largely because of Johnson's masterful stewardship of the 1957 Civil Rights Act, which, in Caro's telling, represented a seminal moment in the revival of the Senate, a body that had fallen nearly into obsolescence prior to Johnson's ascension to Majority Leader after but a single term in the Senate.¹⁰⁹ It remains to be seen what Caro will make of Johnson's presidency, but it seems reasonable to assume, based on the voluminous treatment Caro gives the 1957 legislation, that if Johnson finds redemption it will come because of Johnson's record on civil rights.

Robert Dallek's only slightly less ambitious two-volume biography of Johnson is more sympathetic than Caro's.¹¹⁰ Dallek compellingly argues that civil rights not only proved to correct 'long standing wrongs' and to create a 'larger, more affluent black middle class', but also that even though white Southerners by-and-large disapproved of much of his program, Johnson knew that 'and end to southern' segregation 'meant the reintegration of the South into the nation'.¹¹¹ (Dallek also argues that Johnson's affirmative action policies proved problematic and did not match his legislative successes.)

Dallek makes a compelling case that it was precisely Johnson's willingness and desire to take on the most seemingly intractable issues – whether in civil rights or in foreign affairs – that led to both his greatest successes and his greatest failures.

The best one-volume biography of Johnson is Randall Woods's 2006 *LBJ*.¹¹² If Caro sees Johnson as a fundamentally flawed man who nonetheless achieved occasional greatness, Woods sees Johnson as a fundamentally great man who nonetheless had serious flaws. Woods shows that much of Johnson's greatness derives from his accomplishments on civil rights, an area to which Woods presents Johnson as deeply committed by the time he ascended unexpectedly to the Presidency. Woods is in the camp of historians who place Johnson alongside Abraham Lincoln with regard to his accomplishments for black Americans.

There is a voluminous literature on both Lyndon Johnson and civil rights and on civil rights during the Johnson years. James Harvey's *Black Civil Rights during the Johnson Administration* concludes that Johnson was better at getting laws enacted than he was in having those laws executed.¹¹³ In 1977 Neil McMillen showed that while Johnson's administration was indeed tentative in ensuring that black voters could register, the mechanisms of the Voting Rights Act had a positive effect in increasing the numbers of registered voters.¹¹⁴

For all of his civil rights successes, Johnson had an ambivalent relationship with the movement by the time he left office. Events in the tumultuous 1960s moved faster than the president could grasp, and so he never fully understood why the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 did not garner him eternal appreciation. In a perceptive 1981 article Bruce Miroff suggested that for all of a president's powers, the office only has limited abilities to wield influence over social movements, as Johnson's example reveals.¹¹⁵ Steven Lawson has, in a series of essays, presented one of the most complete pictures of LBJ's civil rights record, which he categorizes as overwhelmingly successful, especially in the political realm, but that also built up expectations that no President, even one as forceful as LBJ, could ever fulfill.¹¹⁶

In the decades that have followed, historians have tried to emphasize the balance between Johnson's clear commitment to civil rights and his epochal legislative victories as well as his shortcomings as his administration proceeded. Mark Stern, who called Kennedy a 'reluctant hero', labels Johnson a 'coincident hero' in the same book. As he climbed the political ranks had 'used race when he had to use it to further his ambitions, and he ignored race when it was of no consequence for those ambitions'.¹¹⁷ But by the time he was president, Johnson had become 'an extraordinary national leader' largely for his civil rights legacy.¹¹⁸ Kevin L. Yuill has shown how Johnson continued to push civil rights beyond the legislative sphere with his overlooked White House Conference on Civil Rights in 1966. The conference, however, revealed the changing dynamics of the late 1960s, as the conference ended up

revealing not a presidency still at the forefront of the struggle for equality, but rather one disintegrating over divisions both internal and external.¹¹⁹

Robert Mann's bracingly written but analytically elusive *The Walls of Jericho* follows the issue of race relations through the careers of Johnson, Minnesota's liberal Senator Hubert Humphrey, and Georgia's segregationist Senator Richard Russell.¹²⁰ In the confrontation between Johnson and the equally wily Russell, Johnson emerges as not only the victor but also the hero, with Humphrey's assistance. The concluding two volumes of Taylor Branch's trilogy on Martin Luther King depicts Johnson as a bold leader whose reputation succumbed to the decade's increasing chaos.¹²¹

The Cold War took more of a toll on Johnson and his domestic agenda than it did any other president. Both Mary Dudziak and Thomas Borstelmann acknowledge Johnson's significance in successfully pushing his civil rights agenda.¹²² Oddly, given that both of their books address the intertwining of the Cold War and civil rights, neither adequately captures the irony inherent in the fact that the president who most redeemed the United States and its racial policies in global eyes succumbed most disastrously to Cold War policies. Both books are much stronger dealing with the period up to Kennedy than they are in handling later events, though Borstelmann's is somewhat more on the mark.

Treatments of Johnson's civil rights policies continue to proliferate and while they stretch in myriad directions, few challenge the basic picture of Johnson as the most committed of all presidents to the general principles of civil rights and the ability of the federal government to ensure racial equality. Jonathan Rosenberg and Zachary Karabell have shown how the Johnson White House recorded far more conversations than did its predecessor and that as a consequence we have a much clearer picture of how civil rights worked under Johnson, especially with regard to the famous Johnson Treatment.¹²³ Steven Goldzwig has examined Johnson's rhetoric in pushing for the still largely overlooked Civil Rights Act of 1968, arguing that Johnson attempted to use 'rhetorical transcendence', speeches that underscored that his political goals were of transcendent importance to the nation.¹²⁴ Dean Kotlowski has shown how Johnson's executive strategies fell short, at least with regard to school integration. Johnson relegated school desegregation to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, continuing the largely ineffectual policies of Eisenhower and Kennedy and, in Kotlowski's view, leaving the issue for Richard Nixon to address.¹²⁵

One of the most complete recent treatments of civil rights during the Johnson years is Nick Kotz's *Judgment Days* which views civil rights through the prism of the relationship, sometimes friendly, sometimes mutually admiring, sometimes collaborative, and oftentimes tendentious, between Johnson and Martin Luther King, Jr.¹²⁶ Kotz admires both men and sees each as indispensable to the struggle for racial justice. Johnson comes across as the rough and tumble pol from Texas, King as the eloquent and

impassioned minister. Kotz does his best to break down stereotypes and to show how Johnson had committed himself to civil rights as a moral issue while King could be every bit as tough as the Texan. Johnson comes across as appropriately complex, and Kotz reveals how Vietnam served both to fracture the Johnson–King relationship and to scuttle the Johnson administration. Because of this fracturing, the work of both men remained incomplete.

William Leuchtenberg's *The White House Looks South* has painted a similarly complex picture of Johnson.¹²⁷ Leuchtenberg chronicles Johnson's development as a Texan, firmly in both the Southern and Western traditions, turned national leader. As a young Congressman he was a loyal member of that region's voting bloc, but as his aspirations grew, so did his voting patterns, and before long Johnson's humanitarianism on racial matters trumped his regionalism. Johnson always understood power, maybe better than any American ever has, but he also was incredibly sensitive, and his drive to use the power of the presidency coupled with a fierce capacity to remember and internalize every slight, real or perceived, fueled Johnson's greatest successes and contributed to his demise. Leuchtenberg paints one of the richest pictures of Johnson that we have.

Tellingly, Leuchtenberg closes his section on Johnson by showing how, for all the vitriol cast his way by liberals and radicals by 1968, among black Americans Johnson still stood as a hero comparable to Abraham Lincoln. Based on the reading of the historiography and an understanding of the history of the Johnson years, this positive rendering seems not just warranted, but just, even if we acknowledge that Johnson fell short in addressing some of the more intractable elements of racism and discrimination that urban riots, Black Power, and the general erosion of the liberal consensus revealed.

Conclusions

Ira Katznelson recently produced a well-received book that is also equal parts lamentation and scholarship. In *When Affirmative Action Was White* Katznelson argues that 'policy decisions dealing with welfare, work, and war during Jim Crow's last hurrah in the 1930s and 1940s excluded, or differentially treated, the vast majority of African Americans' and how southern politicians worked to increase and exacerbate this disparity.¹²⁸ Presidents Roosevelt and Truman chose not to act early to prevent such discriminatory politics and succeeding presidents could not or would not step in to counteract the effect of these policies that thus became affirmative action for whites at the expense of blacks.

Nonetheless, by the end of World War II historical winds of change were blowing across the globe, manifesting in anti-colonial struggles around the world and in an increased demand for racial equality at home. Presidents found themselves unable to control or corral the new demands,

and the Cold War generation of presidents instead found themselves reacting to events over which they had little control. As we have seen, some did so better than others. But if none handled the issue as nobly or as heroically as we might wish that they would have, it also seems that O'Reilly's flattened landscape, if well intended, does an injustice to the richness of the lived historical experience. Less important than whether a president was 'good' or 'bad' on the question of civil rights is how each chose to confront the issue as it emerged. Even the least engaged of these four executives on civil rights, Dwight Eisenhower, was not a racist and he was appalled by events such as those at Little Rock. Even the most heroic among them, Johnson, failed or disappointed black Americans and their allies in a host of ways. Historians should not be in the business of merely keeping a ledger sheet, even if inevitably we must make judgments and even if those judgments are sometimes harsh.

William Leuchtenberg is arguably the greatest living practitioner of Clio's craft. In his introduction to *The White House Looks South*, which is worth the price of the book on its own, he makes an impassioned argument that place and section are important, that political history matters, that the state can still be an important actor, that individuals are a vital historical force, and that chief among these, American Presidents have made a difference in shaping their country's history.¹²⁹ The role of the modern presidency in responding to the Civil Rights Movement shows the basic wisdom of Leuchtenberg's *cri d'oeur*. Even if Presidents have rarely led on matters of race, the ways in which they reacted, how quickly they proved willing to follow, made a difference, sometimes for good, sometimes for ill. The Cold War presidents faced two of the greatest challenges in American history. Black Americans forced white Presidents to address the most intractable problem in the nation's history at a time when most would have preferred not to do so. It is vital to understanding modern America that we attempt to understand how those presidents responded.

Short Biography

Derek Catsam focuses his research and writing on race and politics in the United States and southern Africa, global terrorism, and sports. He is currently working on books on the Journey of Reconciliation and the Freedom Rides, Boycotts in the United States and South Africa in the 1940s and 1950s, the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa in the 1980s, and sports and society in the United States since the Civil War. His first book, *Bleeding Red: A Red Sox Fan's Diary of the 2004 Season* represented a labor of love. Catsam teaches at the University of Texas of the Permian Basin. He has held fellowships at Rhodes University in South Africa (from Rotary International), the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, the American Political Science Association, the Institute of Southern Studies at the University of South Carolina, the Virginia Foundation for the

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Notes

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¹ Charles Eagles, 'Toward New Histories of the Civil Rights Era', *The Journal of Southern History*, 66/4 (November 2000): 815–48.

² Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000). See also Dudziak's article, 'Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative', *Stanford Law Review*, 41/1 (November 1988): 61–120.

³ See also John David Skretzky's theoretically driven article, 'The Effect of the Cold War on African-American Civil Rights: America and the World Audience, 1945–1968', *Theory and Society*, 27/2 (April 1998): 237–85.

⁴ Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

⁵ The bulk of this article will focus on specific presidencies and historians' treatments of them, but the works that follow in this section provide a foundation both for the larger historical question of the presidency and civil rights and would provide a solid foundation for students just beginning to explore this topic.

⁶ Allan Wolk, *The Presidency and Black Civil Rights: Eisenhower to Nixon* (Rutherford, Madison, and Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1971).

⁷ Steven A. Shull, *The President and Civil Rights: Leadership and Change* (New York, NY: Greenwood Press, 1989).

⁸ *Ibid.*, xi.

⁹ Hugh Davis Graham, *The Civil Rights Era: Origins and Development of National Policy, 1960–1972* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

¹⁰ For one attempt James W. Riddlesperger and Donald W. Jackson (eds.), *Presidential Leadership and Civil Rights Policy* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1995). The essays in this book emphasize the post-*Brown* era with middling success. Many rely far too much on theoretical models and quantitative analysis and are of limited use to historians or students, though a handful may be of continuing relevance.

¹¹ See Robert C. Smith's perceptive review essay, "'Hammering at the Truth": The Civil Rights Era and After', *Transition*, 54 (1991): 90–103. Smith is particularly insightful in his criticisms of Graham's anachronistic depiction of the civil right era's chronology and origins.

¹² Garth E. Pauley, *The Modern Presidency & Civil Rights: Rhetoric on Race From Roosevelt to Nixon* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2001).

¹³ Kenneth O'Reilly, *Nixon's Piano: Presidents and Racial Politics from Washington to Clinton* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1995).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁵ Alonzo L. Hamby, *Man of the People: A Life of Harry S. Truman* (New York, NY/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 640.

¹⁶ Richard Kirkendall, *The Truman Period as a Research Field, a Reappraisal, 1972* (Columbia, MI: University of Missouri Press, 1974); Monroe Billington, 'Freedom to Serve: The President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Forces, 1949–1950', *The Journal of Negro History*, 51/4 (October 1966): 262–74; Billington, 'Civil Rights, President Truman and the South', *The Journal of Negro History*, 58/2 (April 1973): 127–39.

¹⁷ Richard Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts, 1939–1953* (Columbia, MI: University of Missouri Press, 1969). Others among Dalfiume's contemporaries who wrote about the desegregation of the military include Ulysses Lee, *The United States Army*

in *World War II: The Employment of Negro Troops* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1966); Richard Stillman, *Integration of the Negro in the U.S. Armed Forces* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1968); Leo Bogart (ed.), *Social Research and the Desegregation of the U.S. Army* (Chicago, IL: Markham, 1969); William C. Berman, *The Politics of Civil Rights in the Truman Administration* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 1970); Donald R. McCoy and Richard T. Ruetten, *Quest and Response: Minority Rights and the Truman Administration* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1973).

¹⁸ Alonzo L. Hamby, *Beyond the New Deal: Harry S. Truman and American Liberalism* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1973); Hamby, *Harry S. Truman and the Fair Deal* (Lexington, MA: DC Heath & Co., 1974).

¹⁹ See Hamby, *Beyond the New Deal*, 188–91.

²⁰ See Hamby, *Harry S. Truman and the Fair Deal*, 171–87.

²¹ Robert J. Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis: The Presidency of Harry S. Truman* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Co., 1977); Donovan, *The Tumultuous Years: The Presidency of Harry S. Truman* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 1982).

²² A notable exception to this trend is William E. Pemberton's almost wholly negative *Harry S. Truman: Fair Dealer and Cold Warrior* (Farmington Hills, MI: Twayne, 1989).

²³ Robert H. Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman: A Life* (Columbia, MI: University of Missouri Press, 1994); Hamby, *Man of the People*; David McCullough, *Truman* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1992).

²⁴ For the sake of expediency and brevity I will limit my discussion to a group of books tied directly to Truman, as this new trend has produced dozens of viable works.

²⁵ Morris J. MacGregor, Jr. *Integration of the Armed Forces 1940–1965* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1981).

²⁶ Sherie Mershon and Steven Schlossman, *Foxholes and Color Lines: Desegregating the U.S. Armed Forces* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998). On Truman's general evolution on civil rights see also 'The Transformation of the Racial Views of Harry Truman', *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 26 (Winter 1999–2000): 28–30.

²⁷ Michael Gardner, *Harry Truman and Civil Rights: Moral Courage and Political Risks* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002). See also Gardner's 'Harry Truman's Famous Day at Howard University', *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 37 (Autumn 2002): 110–14, in which he gives the story of Truman's invitation and delivery of the commencement address at America's most elite black institute of higher learning, Howard University, at the behest of that school's president, Mordecai Johnson.

²⁸ For the purposes of this article I will assume that civil rights is a fundamentally different beast from slavery, though the two are obviously inextricably linked.

²⁹ Gardner, *Harry Truman and Civil Rights*, 107.

³⁰ William Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Lyndon B. Johnson* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2005).

³¹ *Ibid.*, 225.

³² There were a couple of early journal articles in the 1960s that addressed Eisenhower's Civil Rights record, including Stuart Gerry Brown, 'Civil Rights and National Leadership: Eisenhower and Stevenson in the 1950s', *Ethics*, 70/2 (January 1960): 118–34. Brown depicts Eisenhower as lukewarm at best, but he operated in a national climate that was itself not conducive to aggressive federal action on the issue. Allan Lichtman similarly reveals a hesitant Eisenhower, even in the face of serious voting rights discrimination after the passage of the 1957 Civil Rights Act in 'The Federal Assault Against Voting Discrimination in the Deep South', *The Journal of Negro History*, 54/4 (October 1969): 346–67.

³³ Arthur Larson, *Eisenhower: The President Nobody Knew* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 124–33.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 133.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 128.

³⁷ Peter Lyon, *Eisenhower: Portrait of the Hero* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1974).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 563.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 753.

- ⁴⁰ Charles C. Alexander, *Holding the Line: The Eisenhower Era, 1952–1961* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1975).
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 118 (first quotation), 119 (second).
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 194–201 (quotation on page 197).
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 201.
- ⁴⁴ Fred I. Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower As Leader* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1982).
- ⁴⁵ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Soldier, General of the Army, President-Elect, 1890–1952, Vol. 1* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1983); Ambrose, *Eisenhower: The President, Vol. 2* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1984).
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 497–9.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 407.
- ⁴⁹ Elmo Richardson, *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower* (Lawrence, KS: Regents Press of Kansas, 1979).
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 105–25.
- ⁵¹ Chester J. Pach, Jr. and Elmo Richardson, *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, 2nd ed. (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1991).
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, 137.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁴ Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976). Vintage issued a new edition of the book in 2004.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 774.
- ⁵⁶ Jack Greenberg, *Crusaders in the Courts: How a Dedicated Band of Civil Rights Lawyers Fought For the Civil Rights Revolution* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1994).
- ⁵⁷ James Patterson, *Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and its Troubled Legacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 80–2.
- ⁵⁸ Michael Klarman, *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). See also Klarman, 'How *Brown* Changed Race Relations: The Backlash Thesis', *Journal of American History*, 81/1 (June 1994): 81–118.
- ⁵⁹ James Duram, *A Moderate Among Extremists: Dwight D. Eisenhower and the School Integration Crisis* (Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall Publishers, 1981).
- ⁶⁰ Robert Fredrick Burk, *The Eisenhower Administration and Black Civil Rights* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1984).
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 263.
- ⁶² Kenneth O'Reilly, 'Racial Integration: the Battle General Eisenhower Chose Not to Fight', *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 18 (Winter 1997–1998): 110–19. (First quotation from p. 110, second from 119.) O'Reilly reiterates many of his assertions, including these exact words, in *Nixon's Piano*. See 165–87.
- ⁶³ Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*; Borstelmann, *Cold War and the Color Line*.
- ⁶⁴ See Borstelmann, *Cold War and the Color Line*, 86–93.
- ⁶⁵ Michael S. Mayer, 'With Much Deliberation and Some Speed: Eisenhower and the Brown Decision', *The Journal of Southern History*, 52/1 (February 1986): 43–76. Quotation from p. 44.
- ⁶⁶ Several political scientists operating within or at least cognizant of this revisionist paradigm have also tended to be more charitable toward Eisenhower and have contributed to this important discussion. They include: James D. King and James W. Riddelsperger, 'Presidential Leadership of Congressional Civil Rights Voting: The Cases of Eisenhower and Johnson', *Policy Studies Journal*, 21/3 (1993): 544–55, who are largely inconclusive, but seem to be on Mayer's side of revisionist debate and withhold or temper their criticism; Mark A. Peterson, *Legislating Together: The White House and Capitol Hill From Eisenhower to Reagan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990) argues that Eisenhower accomplished more by aiming for less, an argument that seems to accept lowering the bar as a legitimate gauge of accomplishment; D. W. Jackson and James W. Riddelsperger, 'The Eisenhower Administration and the 1957 Civil Rights Act', in Shirley A. Warshaw (ed.), *Reexamining the Eisenhower Presidency* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993) argue that Eisenhower was intimately involved in helping to craft the 1957 act and that he was on top of the process for getting such legislation passed; Steven R. Goldzwig and

George Dionisopoulos, 'Crisis at Little Rock: Eisenhower, History and Mediated Political Realities', in Martin J. Medhurst (ed.), *Eisenhower's War of Words: Rhetoric and Leadership* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University, 1994), who argue that Eisenhower's reluctance to act marked a combination of his principled opposition to federal intervention as well as to his rhetorical style, an argument that in a sense bolsters Burk's conclusions.

⁶⁷ Elizabeth Jacoway, *Turn Away Thy Son: Little Rock, the Crisis That Shocked the Nation* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2007).

⁶⁸ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (New York, NY: Fawcett Premier, 1965).

⁶⁹ Theodore C. Sorenson, *Kennedy* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1965).

⁷⁰ Harris Wofford, *Of Kennedys and Kings: Making Sense of the Sixties* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1980).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁷² Herbert S. Parmet, *JFK: The Presidency of John F. Kennedy* (New York, NY: Penguin, 1983), 249.

⁷³ David Burner and Thomas R. West, *The Torch is Passed: The Kennedy Brothers & American Liberalism* (St. James, NY: Brandywine Press, 1984), 180.

⁷⁴ Thomas C. Reeves, *A Question of Character: A Life of John Kennedy* (Rocklin, CA: Prima Publishing, 1992), 336–7.

⁷⁵ Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy: Profile of Power* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1993).

⁷⁶ Robert Dallek, *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 2003), 707.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 708.

⁷⁸ Victor Navasky, *Kennedy Justice* (New York, NY: Atheneum, 1971).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁸⁰ Robert Steamer, 'Presidential Stimulus and School Desegregation', *Phylon*, 24/1 (1963): 20–33.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 31

⁸² James Harvey, *Civil Rights during the Kennedy Administration* (Hattiesburg, MS: University & College Press of Mississippi, 1971), 71.

⁸³ Carl Brauer, *John F. Kennedy and the Second Reconstruction* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1977), vii. Brauer would go on to compile and edit the Kennedy papers on civil rights on to microfilm for University Publications. These were released in two groups in 1987. An invaluable resource for historians, the collection totals 47 reels of microfilm.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, ix.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 320.

⁸⁶ John Hart, 'Kennedy, Congress, and Civil Rights', *Journal of American Studies*, 13/2 (August 1979): 165–78.

⁸⁷ Hart, 'Kennedy, Congress, and Civil Rights', 165–6.

⁸⁸ Henry Fairlee, *The Kennedy Promise: The Politics of Expectation* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1973); Lewis Paper, *The Promise and the Performance: The Leadership of John F. Kennedy* (New York, NY: Crown, 1976); Bruce Miroff, *Pragmatic Illusions: The Presidential Politics of John F. Kennedy* (New York, NY: David McKay, 1976).

⁸⁹ Hart, 'Kennedy, Congress, and Civil Rights', 178.

⁹⁰ Mark Stern, *Calculating Visions: Kennedy, Johnson & Civil Rights* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992); Stern, 'Calculating Visions: Civil Rights Legislation in the Kennedy and Johnson Years', *Journal of Policy History*, 5/2 (1993): 231–47.

⁹¹ Stern, 'Calculating Visions', 232–3.

⁹² Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1988), 918.

⁹³ William Chafe, 'Kennedy and the Civil Rights Movement', in J. Richard Snyder (ed.), *John F. Kennedy: Person, Policy, Presidency* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1988), 65–6.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁹⁵ Irving Bernstein, *Promises Kept: John F. Kennedy's New Frontier* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991), 295–6.

⁹⁶ O'Reilly, *Nixon's Piano*, 189.

⁹⁷ Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 155–6.

⁹⁸ Borstelmann, *Cold War and the Color Line*, 163–4.

- ⁹⁹ Dean Kotlowski, 'With All Deliberate Delay: Kennedy, Johnson, and School Desegregation', *The Journal of Policy History*, 17/2 (2005): 155–92.
- ¹⁰⁰ See David Niven, *The Politics of Injustice: The Kennedys, The Freedom Rides, and the Electoral Consequences of a Moral Compromise* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2003); Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006); and my own work, 'A Brave and Wonderful Thing': *The Journey of Reconciliation, the Freedom Rides, and the Integration of Interstate Transport* (which stems from my 2003 Ohio University dissertation and is now in the review process for publication).
- ¹⁰¹ Nick Bryant, *The Bystander: John F. Kennedy and the Struggle For Black Equality* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006).
- ¹⁰² For a perceptive review essay on *The Bystander* see Sheldon M. Stern, 'John F. Kennedy and the Politics of Race and Civil Rights', *Reviews in American History*, 35 (March 2007): 118–25. Stern is at points in his essay perhaps a bit too apologetic for Kennedy, but he does an effective job of taking Bryant to task for his forays into counterfactualism.
- ¹⁰³ See, for example, Jonathan Rosenberg and Zachary Karabell, *Kennedy, Johnson, and the Quest for Justice: The Civil Rights Tapes* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 2003).
- ¹⁰⁴ O'Reilly, *Nixon's Piano*, 239–76.
- ¹⁰⁵ Lyndon Baines Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives on the Presidency 1963–1969* (New York, NY: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 157.
- ¹⁰⁶ Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, *Lyndon B. Johnson: The Exercise of Power, A Political Biography* (New York, NY: The New American Library, 1966).
- ¹⁰⁷ Eric F. Goldman, *The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969).
- ¹⁰⁸ Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, rev. ed (New York, NY: St. Martin's Griffin, 1991 [1975]), 230.
- ¹⁰⁹ Robert Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson, The Path to Power, Vol. 1; Means of Ascent, Vol. 2; Master of the Senate, Vol. 3* (New York, NY: Alfred A Knopf, 1982; 1990; 2002).
- ¹¹⁰ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1908–1960* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991); Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961–1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- ¹¹¹ Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 624, 625.
- ¹¹² Randall B. Woods, *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 2006).
- ¹¹³ James C. Harvey, *Black Civil Rights during the Johnson Administration* (Jackson, MS: University and College Press of Mississippi, 1973).
- ¹¹⁴ Neil McMillen, 'Black Enfranchisement in Mississippi: Federal Enforcement and Black Protest in the 1960s', *The Journal of Southern History*, 43/3 (August 1977): 351–72.
- ¹¹⁵ Bruce Miroff, 'Presidential Leverage over Social Movements: The Johnson White House and Civil Rights', *The Journal of Politics*, 43/1 (February 1981): 2–23.
- ¹¹⁶ Steven F. Lawson, *Civil Rights Crossroads: Nation, Community, and the Black Freedom Struggle* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003). See especially Part II, 'Lyndon B. Johnson and the Black Freedom Struggle,' 29–94.
- ¹¹⁷ Stern, *Calculating Visions*, 115–16.
- ¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 230.
- ¹¹⁹ Kevin L. Yuill, 'The 1966 White House Conference on Civil Rights', *The Historical Journal*, 41/1 (March 1998): 259–82.
- ¹²⁰ Robert Mann, *The Walls of Jericho: Lyndon Johnson, Hubert Humphrey, Richard Russell, and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1996).
- ¹²¹ Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963–65* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1998); Branch, *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965–68* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2006).
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- ¹²⁵ Kotlowski, 'With All Deliberate Delay'.
- ¹²⁶ Nick Kotz, *Judgment Days: Lyndon Baines Johnson, Martin Luther King Jr., and the Laws That Changed America*, (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005).

¹²⁷ Leuchtenberg, *White House Looks South*, 229–383.

¹²⁸ Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth Century America* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), x.

¹²⁹ Leuchtenberg, *White House Looks South*, 2.

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(Note: because this is a historiographical article that cites dozens of books and articles, this bibliography will consist of only a representative sample of works directly on the presidency and civil rights.)

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