



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Truman Civil Rights Symposium to Commemorate National 75th Anniversary of the Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces July 26-28 in Washington, DC

Public event hosted by Truman Library Institute to honor Black veterans' history of service and sacrifice and explore the legacy of President Truman's watershed civil rights decision

Participants include Chief of Staff of the U.S. Air Force Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.; U.S. Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Linda Fagan; U.S. Navy Adm. Michelle Howard (Ret.); U.S. Rep. James Clyburn; U.S. Rep. Emanuel Cleaver; journalists Eugene Robinson, Michele Norris

WASHINGTON, D.C. (June 27, 2023) — The [Truman Library Institute](#) today announced the [Truman Civil Rights Symposium](#) — a national 75th anniversary commemoration of the desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces — on July 26-28 in Washington, DC. Organized by the Truman Library Institute — the nonprofit partner of the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum — and sponsored by Boeing and CPKC, the public event will honor the long history of Black veterans' service and sacrifice to the nation and explore the legacy of President Harry S. Truman's watershed decision that paved the way for the civil rights movement. [Registration](#) for in-person and livestream participation is now open.

On July 26, 1948, President Truman changed the course of American history. Truman's Executive Order 9981 officially declared "there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin."

"Black Americans fought and sacrificed in every military conflict in our nation's history since the Revolutionary War — despite being denied civil rights as civilians," **said Clifton Truman Daniel, eldest grandson of President Truman** and honorary chair the Truman Library Institute. "My grandfather did what Congress would not: he desegregated the U.S. Armed Forces and signaled that Americans could no longer reconcile racial inequity with the values our nation had fought to uphold. His actions cemented his legacy as a president determined to uphold the civil rights of all Americans."

WWI VETERAN HARRY TRUMAN OUTRAGED BY VIOLENCE AGAINST WWII VETERANS

As a WWI veteran, President Truman was outraged by the violence against Black veterans returning from WWII to the segregated South — and the silent reaction of state authorities. Black veterans

were often shunned, insulted — even brutalized and killed — in an attempt to reimpose the pre-war racial status quo.

For President Truman, these gross injustices were a call to action. Though he knew strong leadership would split his party and perhaps cost him an election, Truman formed the first-ever President's Committee on Civil Rights that issued its 1947 landmark report, To Secure These Rights, calling for equal voting rights, the creation of a Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department to combat lynching and other assaults on Black lives and freedoms, equal employment and fair-housing laws.

On June 29, 1947, Truman became the first president to address the NAACP, pledging his support to uphold the civil rights of all Americans. On July 26, 1948, Truman issued Executive Order 9981 to fully integrate the U.S. military. (That same day, Truman also signed Executive Order 9980 which banned racial discrimination in federal hiring.)

“As an 8-year-old boy in 1948, I remember reading the news about Truman issuing Executive Order 9981. His bold decision to desegregate the military was instrumental to the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education*, which desegregated public schools across the country when I was just 14 years old,” **said Assistant Democratic Leader James E. Clyburn** of South Carolina and honorary co-chair of the Truman Civil Rights Symposium. “President Truman was elected president against all odds. When given the opportunity to enact tremendous change, he took it, despite the possible political fallout. I deeply admire his leadership, his contributions to the civil rights movement, and his commitment to moving this country forward.”

Truman's executive orders were pivotal to advancing civil rights in America, paving the road for groundbreaking legislation and U.S. Supreme Court decisions in the 1950s and 60s.

“President Truman's actions ensured that from this time forward, the federal government would not stay neutral in the struggle for civil rights. He stepped forward and placed himself directly in the line of fire — even putting his reelection in jeopardy,” **said U.S. Representative Emanuel Cleaver, II**, and honorary co-chair of the Truman Civil Rights Symposium. “His decision to eliminate racial discrimination within America's armed forces was a true display of moral leadership — and a monumental contribution to the civil rights movement.”

TRUMAN CIVIL RIGHTS SYMPOSIUM HIGHLIGHTS

- **WEDNESDAY, JULY 26 (LIBRARY OF CONGRESS)** — The Truman Civil Rights Symposium will open with a special program featuring **Dr. Carla Hayden, 14th Librarian of Congress, U.S. Rep. James E. Clyburn,** and **Judge Richard Gergel**, United States District Court for the District of South Carolina, to discuss post-World War II violence against Black veterans, including the blinding of Sergeant Isaac Woodard — a galvanizing event in President Truman's civil rights journey and the original impetus for Executive Order 9981.
- **THURSDAY, JULY 27 (GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY, NATIONAL ARCHIVES)** — Public programs will explore the history of Black American military service, its role in the civil rights struggle, Truman's executive orders, and the Black veteran experience. Panelists include **Ambassador John L. Estrada, U.S. Navy Admiral Michelle Howard (Ret.), U.S. Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Linda Fagan** and journalists **Michele Norris** and **Eugene Robinson**, among others. A keynote address (to be announced) will be hosted during a reception at the National Archives.
- **FRIDAY, JULY 28 (NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE)** — **Commander Theodore “Ted” Johnson (Ret.)** will moderate a discussion on the continuing role of the armed services as a leading agency of inclusion in American society. The Truman Civil Rights

Symposium will close with remarks by **General Charles Q. Brown, Jr., Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force** (recently nominated as the next chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff).

Truman's bold leadership in 1948 also included the [Women's Armed Services Integration Act](#) which legally permitted women to serve in all four branches of the military.

"Truman understood his fellow veterans and what they were going through. He understood that for those of us who have served our country, we don't want you to look at us as women or African Americans; we want you to see us as Americans," said **U.S. Navy Admiral Michelle Howard (Ret.)**, honorary vice chair of the Truman Civil Rights Symposium, the first woman to reach the rank of four-stars in the U.S. Navy and the first Black woman to reach three and four stars in the Armed Forces. Howard, recently honored by the Truman Library Institute with the Truman Legacy of Leadership Award, said she is continually inspired by Truman's own words:

"If we wish to inspire the peoples of the world whose freedom is in jeopardy, if we wish to restore hope to those who have already lost their civil liberties, if we wish to fulfill the promise that is ours, we must correct remaining imperfections in our practice of democracy. We know the way; we only need the will." ([President Truman's address to the Congress on Civil Rights, Feb. 2, 1948](#)).

The [Truman Civil Rights Symposium](#) is free and open to the public. Registration for both in-person and livestream participation is required. To learn more, visit www.TrumanLibraryInstitute.org/Civil-Rights-Symposium

ABOUT THE TRUMAN LIBRARY INSTITUTE

The [Truman Library Institute](#) is the member-supported, nonprofit partner of the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum — one of 15 presidential libraries of the National Archives. The Institute was founded by President Truman to ensure that his Presidential Library would flourish as a "classroom for democracy" where young people, especially, might better understand the American presidency and the fundamental principles guiding our democracy. Nationally acclaimed civics-education programs — including the White House Decision Center — serve nearly 50,000 students and teachers annually, inspiring the next generation to lead lives of service and purpose. For more, visit www.TrumanLibraryInstitute.org

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