



Harry Truman

President Harry S. Truman created a first-of-its-kind Committee on Civil Rights, endorsed their landmark report, adopted their recommendations in his Civil Rights platform, and ultimately desegregated the military and federal workforce through Executive Order. When America desperately needed a leader to advance its promise of freedom, Truman stepped forward. His courageous leadership in the 1940s paved the way for Civil Rights reform in the 1960s, and stands today as the benchmark for dreams yet deferred.



★ 1946

February 12 — Isaac Woodard, an African American WWII veteran, is brutally attacked and blinded hours after being honorably discharged. When Truman learns of this atrocity, and others, he vows, "I shall fight to end evils like this."

★ 1939-1945

September 1, 1939 to September 2, 1945 — Of the 2.5 million African American men who register for the draft through December 31, 1945, more than one million, along with thousands of African American women, serve with distinction in World War II in all branches of service and in all Theaters of Operation.



★ 1947

October 29 — The President's Committee on Civil Rights issues their landmark report, *To Secure These Rights*. The Committee calls 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.

★ 1946

December 5 — Truman issues Executive Order 9808 creating a first-of-its-kind Committee on Civil Rights to propose measures to strengthen and protect the Civil Rights of the American people.



★ 1948

February 2 — President Truman calls for a series of legislative proposals based on the findings in *To Secure These Rights* in the first-ever, comprehensive presidential message on Civil Rights delivered to Congress.

★ 1947

June 29 — Truman becomes the first President to address the NAACP, also marking the first time a president addresses a Civil Rights organization. He delivers the strongest statements heard on Civil Rights since Abraham Lincoln.



★ 1948

October 29 — In the last days of the election, Truman makes a campaign appearance in Harlem. It is the first time a U.S. president visits the symbolic capital of Black America.

★ 1948

July 26 — Truman signs Executive Order 9981, which desegregates the U.S. Armed Forces, and Executive Order 9980, which prohibits race-based employment discrimination in the federal government.

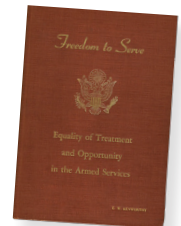


★ 1949

January 12 — In the Fahy Committee's first meeting with President Truman and the Secretaries of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Defense, Truman says, "I want concrete results—that's what I'm after—not publicity on it." The Committee takes him literally, not only investigating conditions but also working quietly and diligently with the Army, Navy, and Air Force to bring about desired changes.

★ 1950

May 22 — The President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services (Fahy Committee), established as part of E.O. 9981, submits its final report, *Freedom to Serve*.



★ 1954

October 30 — The Armed Services announces integration of all of its branches after some branches resisted and delayed implementation of E.O. 9981.

★ 1954

May 17 — The enactment of E.O. 9981 paves the way for the Civil Rights movement, including the desegregation of public schools. In *Brown vs. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court reviewed a briefing about the successful integration of military units before declaring that racial segregation in public schools is unconstitutional, noting there had been no loss of efficiency and outstanding morale in integrated units.



CLICK THE IMAGES to view relevant resources and materials from the Truman Library.