

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: A DAVID AGAINST GOLIATH: THE AMERICAN VETERANS COMMITTEE'S CHALLENGE TO THE AMERICAN LEGION IN THE 1950s

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This study joins a nascent body of scholarship that seeks to enrich and complicate understanding of 1950s political culture. While this newer scholarship acknowledges conservative dominance, it has also uncovered considerable evidence that the period was far more politically diverse and contested. This study demonstrates that there was no single, unitary conservative Americanism or patriotism in the fifties decade. Instead, the American Veterans Committee, despite suffering heavy membership losses after purging the Communist Party from its ranks in the late 1940s, survived, regrouped and persistently challenged the hegemonic conservative American Legion, (the nation's largest veterans' organization) throughout the 1950s. Using a liberal version of what I term Cold War Americanism, the AVC attempted to defend and advance the New Deal legacy. The Legion, however, using a conservative version of anti-Communist discourse, joined with its counterparts in the postwar Right to oppose the interventionist liberal state. I explore the role of these contending languages in shaping 1950s political culture by analyzing how these two groups used Cold War Americanism to advance their respective interest concerning two of the period's most important domestic issues: the restriction on civil liberties, and the developing struggle for African-American civil rights. This study demonstrates that within the community of organized veterans, the American Legion was not the only voice heard in the 1950s. Any account of this period that fails to acknowledge the presence of the AVC would be incomplete and inaccurate.

A DAVID AGAINST GOLIATH: THE AMERICAN VETERANS COMMITTEE'S  
CHALLENGE TO THE AMERICAN LEGION IN THE 1950s

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
2010

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Speaking to the Chicago Accident and Health Association on May 17, 1950, American Legion national commander George N. Craig leveled a blistering attack on the State Department, declaring that it “reeks with deceit, depravity and double talk.” The next day, as the *New York Times* reported, Michael Straight, national chairman of the American Veterans Committee (AVC) publicly denounced the speech as a “defense” of Sen. Joseph McCarthy. As Straight charged, “the Legion has used the same pack of lies and malicious gossip as is contained in McCarthy’s original charges against the State Department.” Further, Straight declared, “AVC is shocked that an organization which claims to be patriotic is joining this un-American attempt to undermine the faith of the American people in their government. At this critical time in the struggle against Soviet communism the bipartisan foreign policy as expressed by the State Department should be vigorously supported by all patriotic organizations.” As Straight concluded, the speech constituted “another boost for Joe Stalin.” Undeterred by the AVC, the Legion continued its attacks on the State Department. At their October 1950 national convention Legionnaires passed a resolution that denounced Secretary of State Dean Acheson and “the presence in the Department of State itself of men well known to possess Communist leanings and tendencies or perhaps even Communist party membership... [for] the failure of the State Department to deal adequately with the grim and bloody advance of communism throughout the world.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *New York Times*, May 18, 1950, 13; *AVC Bulletin*, May, 1950, 2. For the Legion’s 1950 convention resolution see: *New York Times*, October 13, 1950, 13. The national conventions in 1951 and 1952

Far more than a disagreement over charges of Communist influence in the State Department informed the actions of these two organizations. As this study argues, the use of anti-Communist rhetoric in this episode reflected two distinct and competing political agendas concerning the legitimacy of the postwar New Deal. Founded in 1919 during the height of the WWI Red Scare to lobby for federal aid to veterans and to combat domestic “Bolshevism,” the Legion emerged in the interwar decades as one of the nation’s premier anti-Communist organizations.<sup>2</sup> Yet beginning in the late 1940s, and continuing throughout the 1950s, the Legion played a significant role in the efforts of the postwar Right to halt the postwar New Deal. As did other conservative individuals and organizations,<sup>3</sup> the Legion sought to discredit liberal reform by associating its vast enlargement of centralized federal authority over domestic affairs with Soviet Communism. From its conservative perspective, the Legion viewed the postwar liberal welfare state as an unwarranted encroachment upon individual liberty, the system of unregulated free enterprise, and state’s rights. These elements informed a conservative Americanism critical of the New Deal as

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passed similar resolutions against the State Department. The 1951 national convention called for “the immediate removal of the present corps of [State Department] leaders” for their “incompetence, indecision and defeatism,” and, “the removal from office in that department, and all other government departments, of any and all persons who are not in full sympathy with our opposition to communism.” As convention delegates declared, “They must be replaced and the State Department reconstituted with men of unquestioned loyalty.” Report of the Committee on Foreign Relations, in *Proceedings of the 31<sup>st</sup> National Convention of the American Legion, Miami, FL, October 15-18, 1951*, published as *House Document No. 313*, 82<sup>nd</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session 84-85, 88. The 1952 Legion convention condemned State Department leaders for their “outright refusal to act” effectively against “the dangers of communism.” It also called for the administration to remove Acheson from his position. *New York Times*, August 28, 1952, 1.

<sup>2</sup> William Pencak, *For God & Country: The American Legion, 1919-1941* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), xii, 14.

<sup>3</sup> On the conservative anti-New Deal backlash, see Robert Griffith, *The Politics of Fear: Joseph R. McCarthy and the Senate* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), 30-31.

“communistic” since the late 1930s<sup>4</sup>, and as the Cold War intensified, they were reasserted in a resurgent postwar nationalist and anti-Communist discourse I term Cold War Americanism. Throughout the 1950s, the Legion regularly drew upon this political language to depict the New Deal domestic reform agenda as detrimental to American national security interests. In these representations, the Legion depicted liberal reform and its allies as “alien,” “un-American,” “disloyal,” and “communistic.” Conversely, the group represented the values and practices of self-reliant individualism, laissez-faire free enterprise and state supremacy over local affairs as the embodiments of “true” Americanism that were indispensable to United States success in the Cold War.

The AVC on the other hand primarily used anti-Communist rhetoric as a language of reform to counter conservative opposition to the New Deal. Formed in 1944 by reform-minded WWII veterans as an alternative to the Legion, the AVC advanced a liberal version of Cold War Americanism discourse that embraced the power of the interventionist state as a positive development, and promoted its expansion to ensure that the nation lived up to its core ideals of democracy and equality of opportunity for all Americans. This liberal Americanism had been forged between the New Deal state and the millions of citizens it had protected from powerful economic interests at home and authoritarian dictatorships abroad.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 159.

<sup>5</sup> Gerstle, *American Crucible*, Chapter 4, esp., 133-139, 140-141, 185-186, and, Chapter 5; John Bodnar, ed. *Bonds of Affection: Americans Define Their Patriotism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 9-10, 11-12. As Gary Gerstle has noted the strong liberal nationalism generated by the New Deal ensured that many Americans conceived of their support for its programs as acts of patriotism. Gerstle, *American Crucible*, Chapter 4, esp., 133-139, 140-141, 185-186, and, Chapter 5.

Anti-Communism played a central role in shaping the AVC. During the tumultuous late 1940s disintegration of the Popular Front liberal-left alliance, the AVC, like many other postwar liberal organizations, purged the Communists from its ranks and permanently barred them from membership<sup>6</sup> But the AVC's postwar agenda focused on strengthening the bonds of liberal nationalism and the social and economic policies that sustained them, not the Communist menace. Even at the height of the Red Scare, the AVC, unlike the American Legion, did not make anti-Communism a "cause." While the Cold War, as Mary Dudziak observes, "created a constraining environment for domestic politics," and narrowed "acceptable [political] discourse," Cold War Americanism discourse nevertheless provided the AVC and other liberals with a rhetoric to press their case for reform.<sup>7</sup>

The AVC used this language to portray conservative opposition to liberal reform as detrimental to national commitments to improve democracy and equal opportunity at home and abroad, that is, as an attack on the same set of ideals federal officials used to advance U.S. leadership of the free world against international Communism. Thus, the AVC's Cold War lexicon represented anti-reform efforts as the work of "false patriots" and "subversives." By depicting anti-New Deal policies as "disloyal," and "un-patriotic" threats to national security, the AVC simultaneously implied that its own proposals were unambiguously "patriotic," and thoroughly

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<sup>6</sup> Robert L. Tyler, "The American Veterans Committee: Out of a Hot War and Into the Cold," *American Quarterly* 18 (Autumn, 1966): 431-433.

<sup>7</sup> Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 11, 15.

“American,” in defiance of efforts by conservatives to link liberalism to radicalism and subversion.<sup>8</sup>

Although Cold War Americanism rhetoric was widely used by other reformers and conservatives, this study does not maintain that it was the only means organized veterans used to promote their agendas. But the evidence reveals that this discourse permeated the public statements of both the Legion and the AVC, and that both groups considered it to be of primary tactical value. Several key themes emerge from this study. First, despite the conservative climate engendered by the Cold War, the 1950s did not produce a unitary, fixed understanding of what constituted patriotism or Americanism. Second, while both groups claimed they represented a singular “true” Americanism, the distinctly different and contending meanings they ascribed to the concept reveals both its fluidity and the fact that it reflected fundamental disagreement, not consensus, among many organized veterans over the shape of the postwar political and social order. Third, the example of the AVC exposes the limits of Cold War rhetoric as a language of reform in the 1950s. Despite the efforts of the AVC to link the need for liberal change to the goals of the Cold War, its successes in this period were rare and, at most, marginal. The overwhelmingly conservative and repressive nature of Cold War political culture severely constrained the ability of liberal veterans to effectively challenge the Legion on anything approaching equal

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<sup>8</sup> My understanding of anti-Communist rhetoric as a liberal language of reform relies heavily upon the recent work of Joanne Meyerowitz, and Mary Dudziak: Joanne Meyerowitz, “Sex, Gender and the Cold War Language of Reform,” Chapter 5 in *Rethinking Cold War Culture*, eds. Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), 106-123; Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.) As Meyerowitz observes, “[A]s a political discourse adopted by a wide range of conservative, liberals, and even radicals, Cold War language had different meanings and different uses in different political contexts. For certain reformers, the Cold War offered a new vocabulary for extending democratic ideals and demanding individual freedom.” Meyerowitz, “Sex, Gender and the Cold War Language of Reform,” 107.

terms. Also, even when used as a reform language, liberal anti-Communist rhetoric undoubtedly helped reinforce dominant Cold War meanings supporting the conservative forces it opposed.<sup>9</sup>

This study then advances two main arguments. First, although the Cold War did provide a basis for promoting liberalism, the example of the AVC in this period highlights the ineffectiveness of Cold War language in advancing reform. Second, while this study is primarily a story of conservative hegemony within the organized veterans' community, the AVC's persistence in challenging the Legion disrupts the notion that an untrammelled conservative consensus defined the political culture of the 1950s. Indeed, as this study argues, the existence of conflicting understandings of both Americanism and the Cold War's purpose among organized veterans sheds additional light that deepens and complicates understanding of the political culture in these years.

I explore these arguments by analyzing how these groups used Cold War discourse to advance their interests concerning two of the most important domestic issues that shaped the decade's political culture: the restriction of civil liberties, and the emerging struggle for African American civil rights.<sup>10</sup> In developing these

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<sup>9</sup> As Meyerowitz observes in her study of women and sexual rights reformers, "In using Cold War language...[t]hey reinscribed the ideology of the Cold War as they attempted to carve out respectable oppositional niches on gender and sexuality." Meyerowitz, "Sex, Gender and the Cold War Language of Reform," 117. For a discussion of the fluid nature of Americanism, see Michael Kazin and Joseph McCartin, eds. *Americanism: New Perspectives on the History of An Ideal* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Throughout this study, the terms civil liberties and civil rights are defined differently. By civil liberties I refer to those individual rights and freedoms, such as the right to free speech, expression and assembly that are guaranteed by the Constitution and federal law from infringement by the government. Civil rights, on the other hand, are understood to be those legal rights that protect individuals from discrimination or unequal treatment based upon such factors as their race, gender or national origin. See entry, Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, by John E. Semonche, in Kermit L. Hall and others, eds., *The Oxford Companion to American Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.), 110.

arguments, I rely upon and contribute to recent historiography in several main ways. First, in uncovering how the AVC used Cold War rhetoric to promote liberalism, this study contributes to a nascent revisionist literature emphasizing the Cold War's positive influence on domestic reform. As these studies contend, while the Cold War fostered political and cultural conservatism, it simultaneously created political space for advancing liberal change. Susan Hartman and Joanne Meyerowitz, for instance, found that while the Cold War reinforced traditional domestic roles for women, middle class women used Cold War rhetoric to promote their claims for equal access to professional occupations reserved for men by arguing that national security demanded the full mobilization of all human resources. While these arguments softened attitudes against employing middle class women, they also helped convince federal authorities to provide funding for educating women in the sciences.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, while scholars have shown how Cold War red-baiting undermined racial reform,<sup>12</sup> Mary Dudziak has shown that black leaders successfully pressured government officials to make improvements in civil rights by arguing that racial inequality at home undermined U.S. efforts to sell democracy abroad to win the Cold War. Yet despite these successes, as Steve Lawson observes, Dudziak inadequately addressed the limits of this strategy to generate reform.<sup>13</sup> In highlighting the failure of

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<sup>11</sup> Susan M. Hartmann, "Women's Employment and the Domestic Ideal in the Early Cold War Years," Chapter 5 in Joanne Meyerowitz, ed. *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 86; 90; 97-98; Meyerowitz, "Sex, Gender and the Cold War Language of Reform," 112.

<sup>12</sup> Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> Mary Duziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); See Steve Lawson's review of Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, in *American Historical Review* 107 (February, 2002): 246-247. As Lawson notes, "the Cold War supplied leverage African Americans could exploit, but it was not sufficient to force the State Department to remove racial barriers in the hiring of career service officers." *Ibid.*, 247.

the AVC's Cold War arguments to advance civil rights and civil liberties this study helps fill this scholarly gap, and demonstrates the extremely limited role of the Cold War as a force for liberal change.

In emphasizing the ideological and political conflicts between the Legion and the AVC, this study also contributes to recent scholarship that has challenged and complicated the notion of a postwar consensus. As recent studies reveal, an analytical lens focused solely on elements of the period's acknowledged conformity and moderate conservatism misses a far more dynamic and complex historical reality. Indeed, as Thomas Sugrue contends, "the 1940 and 1950s was a period of intense cultural contestation, not of homogeneity or consensus," resulting in "a series of battles—political, economic, and cultural—to define American society." As Sugrue has shown, racial discord and resistance to civil rights, often violent, was not confined to the segregated South; rather it pervaded postwar Northern society generally, and was rife even among liberalism's seemingly most devout unionized white constituents in Detroit.<sup>14</sup> As this study reveals the national American Legion, the largest postwar veterans' organization, was a major force for segregation in the 1950s. The sharply conflicting positions of the Legion and the AVC on civil rights reform uncovered in this study further underscore the lack of consensus in postwar race relations. Also, the

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas Sugrue, "Reassessing the History of Post War America," in *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies* 20 (1995): 494-495; and, Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); and Thomas Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008). Meyerowitz also challenges the postwar consensus paradigm in a recent collection of essays documenting women's postwar reform activism that defies the notion that all women conformed to prescribed consensus norms of domesticity. Joanne Meyerowitz, ed. *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994). Similarly, in his path breaking examination of masculinity in the 1950s, James B. Gilbert discovered no "single, prevailing agreed-upon norm of masculinity," but instead, "not only variety, but the contending shapes of gender that began to look like the diversity expressed so famously in the next decades." James B. Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 8.

existence of two contending versions of Americanism among these groups also accords with the findings of recent scholars challenging the consensus interpretation. As historian Stuart Little argues, while federal officials and corporations created the late 1940s Freedom Train program to both showcase and foster Cold War consensus ideology, it nevertheless mirrored “the conflicting forces and languages within the political culture that were attempting to define American citizenship and Americanism.”<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, in demonstrating that organized veterans used anti-Communism to advance opposite political agendas, this study sheds additional light on Joanne Meyerowitz’s contention that the meanings of anti-Communism were not fixed or stable, but instead malleable and contested, and therefore capable of supporting the needs of various political interests.<sup>16</sup>

In making this argument I depart from recent scholarship on postwar veterans, in particular the work of Robert Saxe, who maintains that the AVC’s purge of the Communists in late 1940s, ensured its hitherto dissenting voice was “subsumed in a cold war consensus.”<sup>17</sup> However, as this study argues, the AVC’s anti-Communist rhetoric did not signal its unequivocal acceptance of the postwar anti-Communist consensus. Rather, its adoption of anti-Communism in the 1950s was primarily tactical, a rhetorical strategy to advance liberal reforms despite conservative hegemony. Indeed, because Saxe confines his analysis of the AVC to the late 1940s

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<sup>15</sup> Stuart Little, “The Freedom Train: Citizenship and Postwar Political Culture, 1946-1949,” *American Studies* 34 (Spring 1993): 38.

<sup>16</sup> Meyerowitz, “Sex, Gender and the Cold War Language of Reform,” 107, 117. Philip Jenkins, for example, has also revealed how, after the 1946 elections, liberal Pennsylvania Democrats successfully used anti-Communist rhetoric to repel GOP red-baiting attacks and retain their large ethnic voting base. Philip Jenkins, *Cold War at Home: The Red Scare in Pennsylvania, 1945-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), Chapter 3, esp. 62-68.

<sup>17</sup> Robert F. Saxe, *Settling Down: World War Two Veterans’ Challenge to the Postwar Consensus* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 4-5, and see Chapter 4 on the late 1940s AVC, esp. 152-153.

and does not analyze the content of its anti-Communist language, he misses the story I tell in this study. As a result, he takes the civil rights activism of black ex-soldiers as evidence that they alone among veterans refused to conform to the dictates of a presumed postwar consensus. “African American veterans offered a sustained and powerful critique of racial inequality in the United States.” Furthermore, he notes, “In calling attention to racial divisions in America, black veterans were undermining the image of national unity that lay at the heart of the growing consensus culture.”<sup>18</sup> As will be seen, by this measure it is clear that the AVC, a vocal and persistent advocate of black civil rights and racial equality throughout the 1950s, did not succumb to an alleged postwar consensus.

This account enriches historical scholarship on veterans in other ways. The relatively few extant studies of organized veterans in postwar politics focus on the late 1940s, leaving the 1950s uncharted territory. Aside from a few very brief examinations of the AVC in the late 1940s, no scholar has produced a full study of the Legion in the 1950s, or examined the history the AVC in the decade.<sup>19</sup> This study then helps to fill some of these important scholarly gaps, in part by moving the chronology forward. Its focus on the Legion’s ill liberalism, particularly in perpetuating racial segregation, serves as a counterweight to studies concerning the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>19</sup> The two extant essay length examinations of the AVC in the 1940s focus on its purge of the Communists: Robert L. Tyler, “The American Veterans Committee: Out of a Hot war and Into the Cold,” *American Quarterly* 18 (Autumn 1966): 419-436; and, Saxe, *Settling Down*, Chapter 4.; for some additional mention of AVC in the 1940s, see Richard Severo and Lewis Milford, *The Wages of War: When Soldiers Came Home, From Valley Forge to Vietnam* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 309-314; and Jennifer Brooks, *Defining the Peace: World War Two Veterans, Race and the Remaking of the Southern Political Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 45, 46, 49, 53, 54, 62, 63, 77. The only work that very briefly discusses some key AVC activities in the 1950s is: Rodney G. Minott, *Peerless Patriots: Organized Veterans and the Spirit of Americanism* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1962), 106-108.

positive effects of the 1944 Servicemen's Readjustment Act, or G.I. Bill, on veterans and postwar society. Keith Olson's pioneering study found that the mass influx of G.I. Bill beneficiaries into universities made higher education more democratic and academically rigorous. Also, while acknowledging racial segregation within the Legion, Suzanne Mettler demonstrates the G.I. Bill produced a generation "intensely involved in public life," who made postwar society much more democratic.<sup>20</sup> Yet this study reveals, the Legion's postwar policies regarding race suggest the need to reconsider veterans' roles as positive agents of postwar democracy.

Existing studies also highlight the central role of veterans' organizations in shaping late 1940s domestic politics and fostering conservative dominance. Jennifer Brooks has shown that white moderate reform-minded and conservative WWII veterans in Georgia coalesced to help usher in a new southern order based upon white rule and economic modernization (without labor unions), defeating the reform efforts of their African American and liberal white counterparts.<sup>21</sup> I build on this scholarship by showing that Southern Legionnaires actively resisted racial reform in decade that followed. Although Michael Kazin and Philip Jenkins briefly discuss the Legion's role as an important source of conservative anti-Communism in the postwar years, neither author examines the anti-New Deal dimension of its political activism, as does this study.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Keith W. Olson, *The G.I. Bill, the Veterans, and the Colleges* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1974). As Mettler observes, "Beneficiaries became more intensely involved in public life, in activities long considered to be critical to self-governance and therefore the lifeblood of American democracy." Suzanne Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens: The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 10, also see esp., 9, 133-134.

<sup>21</sup> Jennifer Brooks, *Defining the Peace: World War Two Veterans, Race and the Remaking of the Southern Political Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

<sup>22</sup> Kazin discusses the Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars as important allies of the postwar Right in appropriating its use of populist language to foster attacks on the liberal-left. Michael Kazin,

One measure of the effects of conservative dominance over the political culture of the 1950s is the AVC's size. In 1956, the Legion had some 2,800,000 members, and throughout the decade it commanded superior resources as the nation's largest organization of veterans.<sup>23</sup> By the end of 1955, by contrast, the AVC had slightly over 30,000 members.<sup>24</sup> Yet despite conservative hegemony, an editorial in 1955 by then AVC national chairman Mickey Levine captures the significance of the AVC's presence in this exceedingly conservative era: "[In] these troubled times—Goliaths overrun the land but the Davids are few. If the AVC did not challenge Goliath, I mean the Legion, then the Legion would have been the ONLY VETERANS' voice heard."<sup>25</sup> Indeed, while fully cognizant of the enormous power of conservative forces it confronted, the AVC nevertheless decided to press ahead in its role as an alternative voice to the Legion in the fifties. The AVC was not successful in obtaining its agenda, but despite Cold War pressures to otherwise conform to reigning conservative viewpoints it persisted through the period as a resilient advocate for liberal change. Throughout the decade, the group attracted leading liberal politicians into its membership ranks, and it worked in alliance with prominent liberal organizations in shaping the postwar reform agenda. While this study, then, underscores the theme of conservative dominance among veterans organizations, as exemplified by the American Legion, it also reveals that any full examination of the political culture of in these years that failed to take account of the AVC would be

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*The Populist Persuasion: An American Story* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 178-183. Kazin, however, incorrectly assumes that the AVC essentially ceased to function in 1949, *ibid.*, 178-179; Philip Jenkins, *Cold War at Home*, esp. 55-57, and *passim*, 94, 115-116, 118-119, 140.

<sup>23</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, September 3, 1956, 4.

<sup>24</sup> The AVC was ranked the fourth in size (respectively) behind the Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Veterans of World War Two (Amvets). *New York Times*, November 13, 1955, 51.

<sup>25</sup> *AVC Bulletin*, December 1955, 2. Emphasis in original.

incomplete and inaccurate. While these two groups are the principal concern of this study, when appropriate, other veterans' organizations, specifically the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Catholic War Veterans, Jewish War Veterans, and the American Veterans of World War Two (Amvets), enter the story.

Of these other groups, a study of the VFW's role in shaping Cold War culture would undoubtedly be interesting and shed further light on the topic of this study. It remained the second largest veterans' organization in the 1950s; and its anti-Communist activities also paralleled those of the Legion.<sup>26</sup> In 1955 the VFW had 1.6 million members organized into 8,682 local posts in 1955.<sup>27</sup> However, unlike the American Legion and the AVC, the VFW lacks a central archive of its records. This unfortunate fact dictated my research strategy from the beginning of this study. But since the Legion and the VFW shared the same conservative anti-Communist discourse, the VFW's inclusion in this study would not substantively alter the story I tell.

One surprising finding of this study is that despite the AVC's constant criticisms of the Legion's actions, the Legion did not in turn attack the AVC. The Legion's decision not to retaliate reflected the fact that its overwhelming power made it largely impervious to such attacks. If the AVC annoyed the Legion at times, the Legion nonetheless remained unwilling to engage in direct debate.

In the chapters that follow, I attempt to provide a more complete history of the role the Legion and the AVC in shaping the political culture of the 1950s. The first

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<sup>26</sup> Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion*, 179-180.

<sup>27</sup> For 1955 VFW membership, see Report of the Quartermaster General, 298, Proceedings of the 56<sup>th</sup> Encampment of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, Boston, MA, August 28-September 2, 1955, published as *House Document No. 354*, 84<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 298. For the number of posts, see Report of the Assistant Adjutant General, *Ibid.*, 169.

two chapters focus on the issue of civil liberties to show how each group attempted to promote their larger political agendas. Chapter 1 argues that although the Legion's campaign against domestic subversion was in keeping with its historical role as a leading anti-radical organization, its main purpose in the 1950s was to stop the advance of the postwar New Deal. I begin the chapter with a brief overview the Legion's anti-subversive activities in the interwar years, and provide evidence that its anti-New Deal stance initially emerged in the late 1930s. I then examine how the Legion's post-WWII anti-Communist campaign, or Americanism program, primarily served as a vehicle to carry out its anti-New Deal agenda. I uncover this agenda by examining representations of the New Deal welfare state that appear in the *American Legion Magazine*, the activities of local Legion chapters, or posts, and in the Legion's work with important postwar conservative individuals and organizations. In these venues, the Legion used Cold War Americanism discourse to depict the New Deal/Fair Deal as unpatriotic, un-American and "communistic."

This discussion sets the stage for a longer examination of the Legion's activities to control subversion, primarily in government, education, and the entertainment industry. As in the interwar decades, the postwar Legion indiscriminately lumped non-Communist liberals and Communists into the same category. But, as this chapter argues, the Legion's anti-subversive efforts in the 1950s were not primarily concerned with curtailing the Communists. Instead, as this chapter demonstrates, their main purpose was to discredit liberalism by linking it to subversion.

Chapter 2 examines how the AVC attempted to counter these efforts and the extent to which it succeeded. While this chapter acknowledges the late 1940s purge of the Communist Party from the AVC, it argues that it primarily used a liberal version of Cold War Americanism discourse to promote the New Deal agenda. After establishing the AVC's pro-New Deal credentials, the chapter shifts the focus to examine how the group represented conservative encroachments on civil liberties in attempting to disassociate liberalism from radicalism. In these representations, conservative attempts to curb subversion became acts that facilitated the objectives of the Communists to weaken American democratic ideals and practices, in ways that undermined national security. These representations are first explored by examining the AVC's campaign against the foremost symbol of postwar conservative opposition to the postwar New Deal—Senator Joseph McCarthy. I subsequently analyze representations the group generated in its opposition to anti-subversive legislation and its defense of the civil liberties of a range of individuals and prominent liberal organizations. But as this chapter reveals, the AVC's attempts to reverse dominant conservative meanings of subversion rarely succeeded. As this chapter demonstrates, the AVC's failure to persuade national veterans' organizations to stem particularly excessive anti-subversive initiatives of their affiliates, as exemplified by the VFW in Norwalk, Connecticut, is emblematic of its inability to effectively challenge conservative hegemony in this period.

The final four chapters address the issue of civil rights. Chapter 3 focuses on the AVC's efforts to use anti-Communist language to promote civil rights policies. It again highlights its lack of success by examining its efforts to promote racial equality

in employment, housing, the armed forces, and G.I. Bill benefits for African – American veterans. The remaining chapters focus on the racial policies and practices of the American Legion. Together they demonstrate how the Legion solidified into a major force for segregation in the 1950s. Chapter 4 sets the broader context for developing this theme by establishing that, throughout the decade, national Legion officials upheld the organization’s long-standing interwar policy that permitted their state and local affiliates to segregate their memberships by race. Although the AVC, a few white and black liberal Legionnaires and black civil rights organizations used anti-Communist discourse to protest the Legion’s racial policies, they proved unable to obtain reform. The chapter also examines how Supreme Court rulings establishing exclusive federal jurisdiction over the enforcement of sedition laws and increasing federal authority over civil rights strengthened pro-segregation forces within the Legion and stifled the possibility of reform.

In Chapter 5, I examine the involvement of Legionnaires in the “massive resistance” that erupted throughout the South against the emerging civil rights movement I focus this narrative on two main events. First I examine the efforts of the Mississippi State Legion to suppress the civil rights activism of its all-black unit, Jackson, Mississippi Post 214. Second, I examine the Legion’s role in the crisis over efforts to desegregate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. Once again, using Cold War discourse, liberal critics, including black Legionnaires, the AVC and the black press, protested the Legion’s actions in these events. In attempting to advance reform, liberals depicted conservative efforts to suppress the freedom struggle as akin to those of fascists and Soviet totalitarians. They also argued that in

violating national commitments to freedom and equality for all citizens, segregationists directly aided the Soviets by providing them with a propaganda weapon to use against the United States in the Cold War. I also show how the Legion and the AVC promoted their agendas regarding segregation using their competing notions of Americanism to represent events in Little Rock. Yet despite efforts by liberals to discredit massive resistance as un-American, in the absence of a broader movement for reform, I demonstrate that the Legion's version of conservative Americanism remained dominant.

As Chapter 6 shows, however, the 1950s saw some progress towards racial reform within the Legion. In late 1959, the Legion expelled its elite unit, the Society of the 40 & 8, from the national body, over its refusal to abolish its whites only membership rule. As the civil rights movement advanced the mid-1950s, the 40 & 8's racial restriction became a matter of national controversy. Opposition to the restriction intensified among black Legionnaires, some white Legionnaires, the AVC, black civil rights leaders, major newspapers and the black press. Despite ousting the 40 & 8, the Legion upheld racial segregation within its own ranks. Furthermore, liberal Cold War arguments failed to advance reform. Rather, despite some interest within the Legion for racial progress, considerations of organizational self-interest primarily forced change. Although racial segregation remained intact, the expulsion of the 40 & 8 is nonetheless significant since it further illustrates that even within the Legion, conservative dominance in the 1950s was disrupted and challenged. In the chapters that follow, I attempt to uncover this complexity.

## Chapter 2: The Legion and Civil Liberties

In late August 1947, the American Legion publicly announced its “‘multimillion dollar’ campaign for 1948 to fight Communist propaganda in the United States.” As the *New York Times* reported, the Legion proclaimed “at least 10,000,000 American homes will receive a booklet each month telling them about some fundamental advantages of American life.”<sup>28</sup> The following week, at their national convention, Legionnaires approved numerous Americanism Committee resolutions to expand their anti-Communist crusade. One from the New York delegation demanded, “that the Communist Party be outlawed in the United States,” and that Communist Party membership “or adherence to Communist doctrines...render any person ineligible for office or employment in any Federal office or agency.” Another resolution, introduced by the Wisconsin delegation, called for an amendment to the Bill of Rights denying its protections in federal and state court proceedings to “subversive citizens” charged with “promoting the overthrow of the Government of the United States by force.” Another called for the national headquarters to establish an anti-subversives training school “without delay.” Underlying these actions, as the Mississippi delegation declared, was the belief that: “Communists and other subversive groups are actively endeavoring to substitute alien ideologies for the American way of life, and to overthrow our Constitution and Government.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>*New York Times*, August 20, 1947, 21.

<sup>29</sup>*Proceedings of the 29<sup>th</sup> National Convention of the American Legion, New York, NY, August 1947*, published as *House Document No. 425*, 80<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1st Session, 104, 105, 107; also see, *New York Times*, August 20, 1947, 21.

While these initiatives marked the onset of a wide-ranging Americanism program the Legion conducted in the 1950s, they also reflected strong continuity with its interwar history as one of the country's foremost anti-Communist organizations. As historian William Pencak has noted, "Throughout much of the 1920s and 1930s, the Legion's was almost the only respectable voice crying that internal radical subversion seriously threatened the nation."<sup>30</sup> As in the WWI years, the Legion's efforts to control subversives in the 1950s Red Scare contributed substantially to the overall retrenchment of civil liberties<sup>31</sup> These infringements were, of course, very much in keeping with established American practices of denying Constitutional rights guarantees to Communists and other radicals, particularly during Red Scares when the public demanded intensified government suppression of dissenters.<sup>32</sup> Further, as in the interwar period, many Legionnaires in the post-WWII years continued to indiscriminately lump non-Communist liberals and radicals into the same political category: as "subversives."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> William Pencak, *For God & Country: The American Legion, 1919-1941* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), xii, 14.

<sup>31</sup> Throughout this study, the terms civil liberties and civil rights are defined differently. By civil liberties I refer to those individual rights and freedoms, such as the right to free speech, expression and assembly that are guaranteed by the Constitution and federal law, from infringement by the government. Civil rights, on the other hand, are understood to be those legal rights that protect individuals from discrimination or unequal treatment based upon such factors as their race, gender or national origin. See entry, Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, by John E. Semonche, in Kermit L. Hall and others, eds., *The Oxford Companion to American Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 8-9.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Griffith, *The Politics of Fear: Joseph R. McCarthy and the Senate*, Second edition, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), 30-31 As Griffith notes, "even during the New Deal most Americans favored denying freedom of speech, press, and assembly to native Communists." Ibid; and see, Ellen W. Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 8-9.

<sup>33</sup> In the interwar period, Pencak notes, "The Legion's definition of un-American...extended beyond those who overtly advocated a new social order. Socialists, pacifists, and liberals whose doctrines overlapped significantly with those further to the left, who expressed sympathy with their grievances, or who went out of their way to defend freedom of speech for militant radicals also felt the Legion's wrath... The Legion enthusiastically endorsed the 'spider-web' chart, a means of identifying Bolshevik sympathizers," drawn up in 1923 by Legionnaire General Amos Fries that, for instance, linked the

Yet, as this chapter contends, the primary target the Legion's effort to define and control subversion in the 1950s was not the Communists and their supposed sympathizers, but rather, New Deal liberalism itself. Throughout the 1950s, the American Legion joined in the broader movement of other conservative organizations and individuals to halt the advance of liberal reform. In keeping with the postwar conservative backlash against liberalism, the Legion attacked the New Deal state as a force that fundamentally threatened the survival of individual freedom, private enterprise and state's rights. These elements informed a 1930s conservative Americanism that attempted to discredit the New Deal by associating it with Communism.<sup>34</sup> After the war, the Right reasserted them in a political language of revived nationalism and anti-Communism, which I term conservative Cold War Americanism. In attempting to cast the New Deal into disrepute, the Legion drew heavily upon this discourse, depicting liberal reform and its allies as "subversive," "alien," and "un-American"—in short, as a threat to national security. As will be seen, at both the national and local levels, the Legion's efforts to promote anti-liberalism in this period proved largely successful.

The American Legion was formed in Paris, France in February 1919 by an energetic group of young Army officers, including Theodore Roosevelt Jr., former Missouri Congressman Bennett Champ Clark, and William "Wild Bill" Donovan, later head of the Office of Strategic Services in WWII.<sup>35</sup> During the height of the Red

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General Federation of Women's Clubs and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom to the presumed world-wide Communist conspiracy. "Pencak, *For God & Country*, 8-9.

<sup>34</sup>Griffith, *The Politics of Fear*, vii, 31-32; Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 157-159.

<sup>35</sup> Pencak, *For God & Country*, 49, 52, 53. Pencak also notes, the interwar Legion tended to attract elite professional men like Theodore Roosevelt Jr., who were especially gung ho volunteers for combat

Scare, the Legion quickly assumed a leading role in campaigns to combat domestic radicalism and to expand federal aid to wounded veterans. For example, Legion lobbying resulted in the creation of the federal Veterans' Bureau in 1921, forerunner of the Veterans' Administration.<sup>36</sup> Along with other patriotic nationalist organizations like the American Protective League, the Legion engaged in vigilantism to purge communities of subversives, often by using violence. However, starting in the early 1920s, largely to dampen public criticism, the group shifted tactics to emphasize legal methods of dealing with subversion. At times, however, particularly as a major strikebreaking organization in the 1930s, the Legion continued to employ physical force against those it saw as threatening the social order.<sup>37</sup> But these episodes aside, the Legion mainly worked within the law to foster its conservative 100% Americanism. It lobbied for anti-Communist legislation at the state level, and it also aided local and federal law enforcement officials, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), to police radicalism by providing them with information on suspected subversives. The Legion centered its intelligence gathering operations in its National Americanism Commission (NAC), which, beginning in the 1920s "became a nationwide clearinghouse for reports on left-wing groups with suspected subversive connections."<sup>38</sup> Legionnaires also often prevented liberals and radicals from appearing in public forums by pressuring local officials to revoke their permits to speak.<sup>39</sup>

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duty. Many Legionnaires who served in WWI had been conspicuously active in the preparedness movement. *Ibid.*, 36-38.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 60, 178.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-12, 22, 36, 157, 164-165, 237.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 162-163, 237.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, 167, 268.

The Legion also attempted to thwart the dissemination of liberal and radical views in the interwar years by monitoring the school system, including higher education, which it saw as a major source of subversive thought.<sup>40</sup> On the one hand the Legion attempted to prevent subversive ideas from influencing young minds through campaigns to ban liberal textbooks from high schools. On the other hand, it sought to instill its values among high school students by sponsoring writing contests for college scholarships focused on Americanism topics, such as the democratic way of life versus Communism.<sup>41</sup> At times, Legionnaires also successfully prodded administrators to dismiss teachers and professors they found politically objectionable.<sup>42</sup> The Legion frequently charged that higher education was under the influence of radicals. In early 1935, NAC director Homer Chaillaux distributed some 2,000 copies of a radio address by Congressman Hamilton Fish to local Legion Americanism officers across the country that attacked nine major universities “as ‘honeycombed with Socialist, near Communist and Communists.’”<sup>43</sup> After Northwestern University professor, and Legionnaire, William Gellerman, in June 1938, charged (in his dissertation) that the Legion “was reactionary and unpatriotic...and... led by men representing the ‘banking, business and military classes,’” Legion national commander Dan Doherty denounced the claims as Red propaganda. As Doherty declared, it “was well known that that many of our institutions of higher learning are hotbeds of communism for the dissemination of

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<sup>40</sup> As Pencak notes, “The Legion regarded schools and especially liberal teachers and textbooks, as sources of an ‘un-Americanism’ Challenging traditional community values.” Ibid., 265.

<sup>41</sup> For textbooks, Ibid., 272-274; for essay contests, Ibid., 268.

<sup>42</sup> In 1927, for example, West Chester State Normal College (PA) fired two professors in direct response to a red-baiting campaign conducted by the local Legion post. The professors “who had a long history of activism in left-wing causes” also served as advisors for the student-run Liberal Club. Ibid., 269-270.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 240-241.

theories and philosophies which are entirely alien to the American concept and American principles under which we have prospered.” New York State Legion commander Jeremiah Cross also pointed out that Gellerman’s thesis director was George S. Counts of Columbia University Teachers College. Convinced that the Depression rendered individualistic laissez-faire capitalism obsolete, Counts wanted the schools to become a leading force in transforming the nation into a collectivist society. Counts thus served to further link Gellerman and higher education generally to the Red conspiracy. As Cross declared, Gellerman’s ideas “would find a responsive appreciation of his desire for a communal state in Professor Counts, whose contribution and visits to the Soviet Union are too well known.”<sup>44</sup>

The national Legion increasingly linked radicalism to the New Deal in the late 1930s as it voiced its concerns over the concentration of power in the liberal state. In February 1938, the Legion used the 129<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Abraham Lincoln’s birth to warn Americans about increasing federal power. Speaking from Lincoln’s gravesite in Springfield, Illinois national commander Daniel Doherty declared, “that ‘tidal waves un-American beliefs and doctrines’ were endangering the balance between governmental authority and individual liberty in America.” Furthermore, he declared, “We need a return of Lincoln’s spirit in the breast of every American, far more than we need a return of so-called prosperity. Economic revivals will surely come in the course of events, if we cleave to the principles of our founders.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *New York Times*, June 28, 1938, 3; for Count’s support of collectivism, see Elizabeth A. Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945-1960* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 191.

<sup>45</sup> *New York Times*, February 13, 1938, 41.

The Legion also took a leading role in lobbying for the establishment of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), created in 1938 by anti-New Deal conservatives. HUAC Chairman Texas Democrat Martin Dies rewarded the Legion by inviting NAC director Homer Chaillaux to appear as one of the committee's initial witnesses. Chaillaux provided Dies with "reams of material on subversives" from the Legion's files.<sup>46</sup> But it was during the committee's hearings in late October 1938 hearings when two California Legion officials, its attorney Ray Nimmo and Harper Knowles, chairman of its Radical Research Committee, directly attacked the New Deal. Their main target was Secretary of Labor Francis Perkins, whom they charged with "coddling" Communists for delaying deportation proceedings against alleged Communist and West Coast Longshoremen's union president Harry Bridges. Knowles also testified that Maritime Labor Board member Dr. Louis Bloch "was formerly a Communist party member," and that his own evidence "proved beyond any reasonable doubt that the Communist party, through its agents, has had complete control of the maritime industry on the Pacific Coast for five years."<sup>47</sup>

The Legion associated the New Deal with radicalism on other occasions in the late interwar years. In early 1940, for example, NAC director Homer Chaillaux along with Catholic Youth Organization director (and former heavy-weight champion boxer) Gene Tunney, Theodore Roosevelt Memorial director David Hinshaw, and

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<sup>46</sup> Pencak, *For God and Country*, 249-250.

<sup>47</sup> *New York Times*, October 25, 1938, 1; *Ibid.*, October 26, 1938, 12. As its state commander, Chaillaux used the California Legion as a strikebreaking force during the Longshoremen's 1934 general strike led by Harry Bridges, an Australian immigrant. Pencak, *For God and Country*, 222-223. Although Pencak mentions that Knowles attacked Perkins and California Democrats as Communist sympathizers, and that he headed the Republican Party backed California Associated Framers, he focuses on Knowles's use of the Legion for personal partisan reasons, but not does explain its role in the HUAC hearings as representative of the Legion's anti-New Deal stance, *Ibid.*, 250.

Boy Scouts directors John Schiff and Victor Ridder issued a public statement denouncing the American Youth Congress (AYC) as “the junior front of the Communist Trojan-horse movement which permits Communists and their fellow-travelers ‘to bore from within’.” While they identified the AYC as “a menace to our free institutions,” they also highlighted the fact that President Roosevelt, Attorney General Jackson, and CIO president John L. Lewis were scheduled to speak at its upcoming national conference, and that Eleanor Roosevelt had continued to support and defend the group. Furthermore, in calling for the AYC’s supporters “to repudiate” the organization, they proclaimed, “This the youth movement whose communistic leaders are hiding behind the skirts of their influential protectors, while attempting to pose as the representative of 4,650,000 American youth.”<sup>48</sup>

After WWII, however, Legion opposition to the New Deal intensified as the group stepped up its efforts to conflate liberal reform with subversion. In late August 1947, the national convention voted 2,796-722 to oppose the Taft-Ellender-Wagner public housing bill, which aimed to make millions of urban residences available to veterans and other low and moderate-income citizens. In January 1948, the *American Legion Magazine* declared the convention vote, “In essence...was between two different philosophies of government—those who believe in public housing and those who don’t.” The Legion’s Housing Committee which urged delegates to oppose the bill, the article noted, “contended that the political doctrine set forth by the measure was one of Federal paternalism...a philosophy...opposed to the principles on which

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<sup>48</sup> *New York Times*, February 9, 1940, 10. Later that year, in late July, Tunney again denounced the AYC before the Legion’s New York City Advertising Men’s Post 209. He was introduced by national commander Raymond Kelly, “who praised the former pugilist’s efforts ‘to prevent subversion of our youth.’” *New York Times*, July 23, 1940, 21.

this nation was founded...[that] could lead to cancerous bureaucracy and socialism.” Indeed, as the article concluded, rather than making “Uncle Sam ...the big boss of the housing industry,” the convention adopted a housing policy “that will help veterans to obtain housing through the normal operations of the free enterprise system aided, when necessary by state and local agencies.”<sup>49</sup>

To avoid establishing a permanent federal public housing program, the Legion subsequently sponsored the Veterans’ Homestead Act of 1948. The act provided permitted 5 or more veterans with loans (financed by tax-exempt Veterans’ Administration bonds) to set up non-profit housing associations to construct homes themselves. As the Legion noted, “No government gift, the deal would be self-liquidating, and the VA would be supplied with funds to loan the capital.”<sup>50</sup>

The Legion also opposed public housing at the local level. For instance, in April 1952, Legionnaire J. Bradley became veterans’ chairman of the Committee Against Socialist Housing, an organization funded by private homebuilders and headed by conservative Democrat Frederick C. Dockweiler to defeat a proposed \$110,000,000 (federally supported) low-income public housing program for Los Angeles. To aid the campaign, Bradley brought in representatives from the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), Disabled American Veterans (DAV), American Veterans of

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<sup>49</sup> *New York Times*, September 1, 1947, 1; Clarence Woodbury, “Should Veterans Come in First in Housing?” *American Legion Magazine* (hereinafter *ALM*), January 1948, passim, 20-21, 47-49. The resolutions the convention passed specified that any federal subsidies to low cost urban public housing “should be made in the form of grants or loans to states and communities with no strings attached.” *Ibid.*, *ALM*, 48. These other resolutions called for: housing preferences for WWII veterans and veterans’ widows; private-public housing conferences “to find ways and means of slashing prices,” federal laws to equalize loans costs of urban and rural properties purchased by veterans, and “legislation to prohibit Communists and members of non-American and subversive organizations from living in Government-financed houses.” In short, the article noted, “Everything this side of socialism...will be done to get GI Joe and his family a better place in which to live at a price he can afford to pay.” *Ibid.*, 48-49.

<sup>50</sup> *ALM*, April 1948, 27, 51-53.

World War Two (Amvets) and Jewish War Veterans (JWV). As Bradley declared, “Veterans have a tremendous stake in defeating Proposition B because the multimillion-dollar housing program it would restore is Socialistic; it would impose new and inflationary taxes on our economy; it would not clear slums; and it would be an added burden on the hundreds of thousands of veterans who have built their own homes.” Despite the Legion’s opposition to federal public housing, President Truman signed the 1949 Housing Act into law in July 1949.<sup>51</sup>

Legion national commanders also increasingly used their positions to express the group’s antipathies towards the New Deal/Fair Deal. As George N. Craig, the first WWII veteran elected as national commander, told the American Federation of Labor (AFL) national convention in October 1949: “The American Legion wishes in this country a state of welfare...but not a Welfare State!...Economic policy-making in the United States must remain in free, private hands and those are the hands of labor and the hands of industry!” The problem, Craig told the delegates, was that the New Deal state had opened the door to “evil philosophies imported from the bankrupt countries of Europe” that were progressively eroding the core foundations of political freedom in America: free enterprise and self-reliant individualism. As Craig declared, “There is a growing disposition on the part of more and more of our people to surrender their rights and freedoms, bit by bit, in return for government security.” Since the Legion had led the effort to secure the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, or G.I Bill,

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<sup>51</sup> Bradley also chaired the state-wide membership commission of the California Legion, and had been chairman of the National Commander’s special housing committee. *Los Angeles Times* April 20, 1952, C6. For Dockweiler’s background and his homebuilder supporters, see Don Parson, *Making A Better World: Public Housing, the Red Scare and the Direction of Modern Los Angeles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 110. While local anti-public housing forces defeated Proposition B, after a long political battle, they also won a 1953 settlement with federal housing authorities that reduced planned 1949 Housing Act supported public housing projects by 57%. *Ibid.*, 100, 114, 135.

the most far-reaching piece of social legislation the New Deal produced, Craig's comments may have initially perplexed some delegates. But Craig was careful to delineate the rationale justifying social provisions for veterans. As Craig informed the delegates, "We do not believe that social security should be primarily and exclusively a government responsibility! We believe the government should supplement such a movement only for that segment of our population which cannot do the job for itself. War widows and disabled veterans are an example of that segment. They have earned government protection through their costly sacrifices in defense of our freedoms, sacrifices which have placed them under everlasting economic handicaps."<sup>52</sup> This restricted view of the legitimate scope of federal social welfare policy had in fact guided the Legion in articulating the parameters of the G.I. Bill. It understood its generous social rights to be exclusively veterans' entitlements earned in battle, not benefits that should be extended to all Americans.<sup>53</sup>

In keeping with its conservative approach to social welfare policy, the Legion also joined the American Medical Association in opposing President Truman's national health insurance legislation. In early December 1949 the AMA announced its approval of an "unprecedented" annual assessment of \$25 per member to amass a war chest of \$3 million dollars "to fight" the Truman plan. As the *Washington Post* also reported "The AMA was assured of the Legion's strong support in its anti-administration battle." That same day, national commander George N. Craig told

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<sup>52</sup> *Report of Proceedings of the Sixty-Eight Convention of the American Federation of Labor, St. Paul Minnesota, October 3-10, 1949*, 395, 396. AFL secretary-treasurer George Meany was not surprised by Craig's speech. As he told reporters, "The Legion changes commanders every year but they all make the same reactionary speeches reflecting the economic philosophies of Wall Street and the National Association of Manufacturers." *Washington Post & Times Herald*, October 8, 1949, 11.

<sup>53</sup> Suzanne Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens: The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 20-22.

White House officials: “We have just begun to fight.” Speaking to the national Legion convention in October 1955, AMA representative David B. Allman praised the group for its ongoing assistance in helping to defeat “creeping socialism.” As Allman reminded the delegates, “the American Legion was one of American medicine’s first and staunchest allies in the campaign against national compulsory health insurance. That is why the American Medical Association has contributed annually for the past five years to the support of the Legion’s anti-communism program.”<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, as the largest veterans’ organization in the postwar years, the national Legion wielded considerable power in Congress, and therefore it could provide kindred groups such as the AMA additional clout. The Legion’s veteran membership swelled from 840,000 in 1920<sup>55</sup> to 2.8 million in 1956, organized into 17,000 local posts. The Legion drew additional strength from its national American Legion Auxiliary, which in 1952 composed nearly a million women active in some 14, 000 local units.<sup>56</sup> In 1956, by its annual expenditures, the Legion held rank as one of the top ten lobbies in the nation.<sup>57</sup> The high proportion of veterans in Congress in the 1950s undoubtedly enhanced its influence over legislation. As Suzanne Mettler has noted, “By 1960, veterans accounted for about 60 percent of the membership of the

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<sup>54</sup> *Washington Post & Times Herald*, December 9, 1949, 1; *Proceedings of the 37<sup>th</sup> National Convention of the American Legion, Miami, FL*, October 11-13, 1955, published as *House Document No. 284*, 84<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 72, 73.

<sup>55</sup> Pencak, *For God and Country*, 49.

<sup>56</sup> On the Legion’s standing as the largest veterans’ group in the 1950s, see *Washington Post & Times Herald*, August 28, 1952, 1; the Legion had 2.7 million members in 1951, see *New York Times*, August 20, 1951, 24; for 1956 membership, *Los Angeles Times*, September 3, 1956, 4. In 1952, the American Legion Auxiliary had 960,428 members organized into 13, 899 local units. See “Report of the American Legion Auxiliary,” in *Proceedings of the 36<sup>th</sup> National Convention of the American Legion, New York, NY*, August 25-28, 1952, published as *House Document No. 284*, 83<sup>rd</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 448. The Auxiliary had some 600,00 members in 1945. Pencak, *For God and Country*, 296.

<sup>57</sup> *New York Times*, December 2, 1956, 65.

House of Representatives.”<sup>58</sup> In the late 1940s, the Legion also had 195 members in the House and 44 in the Senate, and so it is likely that even more were Legionnaires in the fifties decade.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, a *New York Times* profile of the “average member of the Eighty-Fourth Congress” in January 1955 noted, “He is married and has two children, is a war veteran, belongs to the American Legion, and is a Mason and Lion.”<sup>60</sup> The powerful Legion spearheaded federal lobbying efforts that greatly expanded veterans’ benefits in the 1950s, which generated enormous controversy in the 1950s.<sup>61</sup>

The Legion’s large membership ensured that it had ample resources to advance its conservative agenda. Its nationally distributed *American Legion Magazine* kept members informed about pending legislation, and served as a major outlet for the dissemination of anti-liberalism throughout the 1950s. The magazine typically featured articles that depicted New Deal/Fair Deal liberalism as an alien, un-American and radical force that threatened to destroy American freedom by tossing aside Constitutional principles of limited government and laissez-faire free enterprise. As William LaVarre told readers in September 1952, “For 20 years now they have been patiently planning us into Socialism and out of our Constitutional Republic. The genesis of their socialist blue prints... originates out of Marx and Lenin and radical Europe by way of Laski, Webb and Keynes of radical London, and is entirely foreign to America and American doctrines. From its inception in the diseased mind of

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<sup>58</sup> Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens*, 132.

<sup>59</sup> Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American Story* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), fn 40, 332.

<sup>60</sup> *New York Times*, January 9, 1955, SM19.

<sup>61</sup> For an overview of its phenomenal lobbying power by a critic, see John E. Booth “Veterans: Our Biggest Privileged Class” *Harper’s*, July 1958, 19-25.

fanatically property-less Marx it has been a pagan ideology against private enterprise [and] private property.” Other writers voiced similar conclusions. According to Ruth Alexander, in a November 1953 article, by exceeding their constitutionally prescribed authority, liberals in Congress were in effect functioning as subversives, radically transforming the country in ways the Communists desired. Under the Constitution, Alexander told readers, “These representatives were commissioned to deal primarily, if not exclusively, with political affairs. In recent years they have increasingly encroached on economic affairs and our form of government has increasingly approached that of our ideological enemies. A bloodless revolution has taken place and we have already made certain qualitative changes in our society that threaten to achieve the goal of our enemies, i.e. to destroy capitalism, the source of all of our freedoms.” Through the fifties, *ALM* regularly published articles authored by key figures in the emerging postwar conservative movement, including William F. Buckley, William H. Chamberlin, Eugene Lyons, Ralph de Toledano, and Freda Utley.<sup>62</sup>

Also, many Legion affiliates served as forums for the articulation of conservative ideas, thus further reflecting the depth of antipathies towards postwar liberalism within the organization. The Los Angeles American Legion regularly invited conservatives to address its Luncheon Club meetings. For example, in early

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<sup>62</sup> William LaVarre, “Is Our Constitution Doomed?” *ALM*, September 1952, 46; Ruth Alexander, “Communism vs. Capitalism, A Study in Contrasts,” *ALM*, November 1953, 53. For articles by these leading conservative writers see, for example, the following issues of *ALM*: Buckley, (October, 1960); Chamberlin, (May 1959); Lyons (January & February, 1949; December, 1954, October, 1956, and October, 1959); Toledano (May, 1954); Utley (November, 1953). As historian George Nash observes, “In the decade after Yalta, Lyons, Eastman, Utley, and Chamberlin would help create the conservative intellectual movement.” George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America: Since 1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 88. For discussion of the roles of Buckley, Chamberlin, Lyons, Toledano, and Utley in making the postwar conservative movement (respectively), *Ibid.*, 140-141; 85-86; 86-87; 101-103; 87-88; and *passim*.

November 1951, W.C. Mullendore, president of Southern California Edison Company warned Club attendees of: “The danger to freedom of the individual citizen arising from invasion by our own government of the rights essential to liberty.” In continuing to increase federal spending on domestic projects, including programs “to build more and more houses on government credit,” he explained, “this nation is... ‘practically reducing ourselves to the level of European totalitarianism.’”

Addressing the California Legion convention in late June 1956, Frank N. Belgrano Jr., chairman of Transamerica Corporation, declared, “It is fashionable today to condemn the Communist, Fascist and Socialist, and properly so. But in our condemnation of them we neglect the many societies and innumerable other organizations of different names spreading alien doctrines dangerous to this country. They carry deceptive banners difficult to recognize.” Nevertheless, Belgrano “labeled as ‘most dangerous’ the groups known as ‘economic planners, social planners and welfare planners.’”<sup>63</sup> As the Americanism chairman of Legion Post 152, Martin B. McNeally, (later Legion national commander, 1959-1960) instituted a forum “under post sponsorship” that brought in leading conservatives “to give public talks.” Speakers included William F. Buckley, Clarence Manion, and columnist George Sokolsky.<sup>64</sup>

Clarence Manion, as Rick Perlstein has recently shown, played a central role in the rise of the postwar conservative movement primarily as the chief architect,

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<sup>63</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, November 7, 1951, 25; *Los Angeles Times*, July 1, 1956, 1.

<sup>64</sup> Robert B. Pitkin, “The National Commander of the American Legion” *ALM*, November 1959, 48; for Sokolsky’s background, see Richard M. Freid, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 89.

beginning in the late 1950s, of Barry Goldwater's campaigns for the presidency.<sup>65</sup> But less known is Manion's work with the American Legion. Author of the *The Key to Peace: A formula for the perpetuation of real Americanism* in 1951, Manion, also a Legionnaire, assumed a major role in the Legion's postwar Americanism program. In *The Key to Peace*, an anti-New Deal tract that climbed to 15 on the *New York Times* best selling list in March 1951,<sup>66</sup> Manion excoriated the liberal welfare state.

"Proposed alternatives to private enterprise all add up to a super-state which will sterilize the natural incentive impulse of human beings with a system of complete endowed 'security.' Just as the nub of private enterprise is freedom, so is slavery the inevitable alternative. For an unidentified benefit deceptively termed 'freedom from fear' we are asked to surrender freedom itself."<sup>67</sup> In early January 1951, national commander Erle Cocke wrote Manion's publisher, Arthur L. Conrad, president of the Heritage Foundation, stating that the Legion "would accept quantities of this book as gifts...for the purpose of placing them in the hands of all American Legion Posts and in the libraries of secondary schools, colleges and universities throughout the United States." Its call to restore the pre-New Deal economic order was precisely what the Legion hoped its anti-Communist campaign would accomplish. As Cocke informed Conrad, "*The Key to Peace* is in full accord with the Americanism program of the American Legion." In late-April 1951, the Legion's National Americanism Commission (NAC) director reported that all state commanders, adjutants and Americanism officers and all post commanders in five states had received the book;

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<sup>65</sup> Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the UnMaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002), 15.

<sup>66</sup> *New York Times*, March 18, 1951, BR5.

<sup>67</sup> Clarence Manion, *The Key to Peace: A formula for the perpetuation of real Americanism* (Chicago: The Heritage Foundation, Inc., 1951), 72.

and in June, it was shipped to post commanders “in the remaining” nineteen states. Major corporations, in particular General Motors and Inland Steel, also participated in the distribution plan. By early June 1951, General Motors purchased 3, 275 copies of *The Key to Peace*, which the Legion subsequently sent to the Michigan Board of Education “for use in the Legion Boys’ State program,” and to post commanders in six states, and the District of Columbia. In acknowledging this “gift” NAC director Allen Willand informed Steve DuBrul of General Motors, “We want to express to you our very deep appreciation for this evidence of your interest in this unusually effective method of reselling Americans on America and your co-operation in achieving our objectives.”<sup>68</sup> Indeed, these firms as Elizabeth Fones-Wolf has shown, were also participants in a massive campaign launched by “important segments of the business community” after WWII to persuade the public of the need to roll back New Deal liberalism.<sup>69</sup> In short, their contributions to the Legion were another important part of this larger effort.

Local posts praised the book,<sup>70</sup> and Manion frequently spoke at Legion state conventions. Shortly after convening in July 1951, the chairman of the Alabama

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<sup>68</sup> Erle Cocke, Jr., National Commander, American Legion to Arthur L. Conrad, President, The Heritage Foundation, Inc. Chicago, IL, January 8, 1951, microfilm, 89-0004, reel 22 D 4, Subject Files, file: “Clarence Manion”; American Legion Library & Archives Indianapolis, IN (hereinafter ALLA); Allen B. Willand, Director National Americanism Commission to Fred L. Maguire, Advertising Director, The American Legion Magazine, April 18, 1951; File: “Clarence Manion.” ALLA.; Memorandum, K. Huggins to Allen B. Willand, June 12, 1951, Ibid., Willand to Mr. Steve DuBrul, General Motors Corporation, Detroit, MI, June 4, 1951, Ibid., for the participation of Inland Steel Corporation, which provided copies to the Tennessee Boys’ State meeting in 1951, see Lewis E. Moore, Chairman Tennessee Boys’ State Committee to Dear Volunteer Boys State, n.d., Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945-1960* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 4; on GM, Ibid., 7, 22, 168; and Inland Steel, Ibid., 83-84, 222.

<sup>70</sup> For positive reaction to *The Key to Peace* from local posts, see Tarlton Stafford, for Marble Falls Post 545, Department of Texas to Clarence Manion, South Bend, Indiana, July 5, 1951. Stafford told Manion he had the “unanimous vote” of the post for “commending you for having written this book, which we feel is a great contribution to the cause of peace...which should be read and studied by every

Legion state convention informed the national office that “We used as our theme ‘The Key to Peace,’ and had as our principle speaker...Clarence Manion.” In July 1952, Manion also addressed 5,000 Legionnaires at their New York State convention.<sup>71</sup> By mid-year 1952, the Legion appointed Manion as special advisor to the NAC.<sup>72</sup> The Legion continued to work with Manion through the 1950s. In 1955, Manion provided idea for a series of Legion-sponsored billboards “selling basic American ideals” which proclaimed: “Communism is Godlessness” and “Protect the Constitution.” Also in April 1959, national commander Preston Moore appeared on Manion’s radio program, the Manion Forum.<sup>73</sup>

With Manion at their side, Legionnaires entered the battle against the liberal state in all its subversive manifestations. The revival of anti-communism leading to the period’s Red Scare brought fresh opportunities for the Legion to confront the nation’s alleged fifth columnists. Communist victory in China and Russia’s atomic bomb detonation in 1949, followed by the Soviet espionage cases, the Communist invasion of the South Korea in 1950, all heightened public anxiety over a widespread Communist conspiracy.<sup>74</sup> Officials at all levels of the Legion proclaimed a full mobilization to counter the threat of internal subversion. In July 1950, as the country

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man, woman and child in this great country of ours.” Ibid.; and see, Robert R. Cherlin, Commander, Rau-Locke Post No. 8 Hartford, CT, to National Commander Erle Cocke, Jr., June 25, 1951, both are in file: “Clarence Manion.” ALLA. As Cherlin told Cocke, “We are fully aware of the fact that too many men in the pulpit are preaching the camouflaged gospel of Communism, and now we have a wonderful weapon prepared for us by Legionnaire Manion to fight back.” Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> D. Trotter Jones, General Chairman 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Convention, American Legion, Department of Alabama to H.H. Dudley, National Adjutant, American Legion, Indianapolis, IN, July 20, 1951, microfilm, 89-0004, reel 22 D 4, Subject Files, file: “Clarence Manion”, ALLA. *New York Times*, July 25, 1952, 9.

<sup>72</sup> *New York Times*, July 25, 1952, 9.

<sup>73</sup> On the Americanism billboards, see “News of the American Legion,” *ALM* 1955, 31; *New York Times*, April 27, 1959, 13.

<sup>74</sup> For a good summary of the major events generating the 1950s Red Scare, see Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense*, 100-106, passim.

mobilized for war in Korea, Justice Matthew J. Troy, the newly elected commander of the Kings County, NY Legion “pledged redoubled efforts” by his unit “to stamp out every vestige of communism in our community life, in our schools, in our churches, in political and civic groups and everywhere the menace of Moscow has raised its ugly head.” Similarly, in October, 1950, Don R. Wilson, national chairman of the group’s Foreign Relations Commission, declared, “We must encourage an individual, activated Americanism. It is up to us to light the torch for this crusade of Americanism and it is time for each individual in America to be asked ‘Are you for the United States or against it.’” Likewise, in January 1951, the Legion’s national Auxiliary president, Mrs. Willis (Hope) Reed, sounded the alarm. “Only an America united in patriotic determination can hope to hold the line for freedom against the hordes now advancing under the Red flag...Against the fanatical zeal of Communism we must array the strength of an enthusiastic, determined Americanism.”<sup>75</sup>

As in the interwar years, the Legion carried out much of its anti-subversive offensive through its National Americanism Commission (NAC). But in 1948, the NAC added an Un-American Activities Office in Washington D.C., under the direction of Karl Baarslag, previously a counter-subversives officer with U. S. Naval Intelligence. The office functioned as a “clearinghouse for information on subversive and counter-subversive activity” and maintained “card files on some 500,000 people identified with Communists or suspected communist movements.” Headquarters also

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<sup>75</sup>Troy also appealed to the patriotism of draftees’ parents by asking them “to cooperate” with the Legion, “in mapping out an effective plan to combat communism throughout Brooklyn.” *New York Times*, July 16, 1950, 59. For Wilson, see *Los Angeles Times*, October 7, 1950, 4. Reed’s comments are in, “The Way Ahead,” *National News of the American Legion Auxiliary*, January 1951, 3. In an April 1953 address at Los Angeles’ Patriotic Hall, the Legion’s national Auxiliary president, Mrs. Rae (Eve) Ashton, emphasized the need to mobilize the nation’s women to help combat domestic subversion. “Everywhere, even in the smaller communities the...Auxiliary should appeal to women, the American mothers, to be on the alert against Communism.” *Los Angeles Times*, April 8, 1953, B2.

made information concerning anti-subversive activities available to Legion affiliates, and other subscribers, through its bi-monthly newsletter, *The Firing Line*. As Ellen Schrecker has noted, the Washington D.C. office did not operate in isolation, rather it functioned within a national “anti-communist network,” composed of various groups and individuals with whom it also shared information. The Legion also maintained close ties to the nation’s leading counter-subversives agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). FBI agent Lee R. Pennington served as the Bureau’s liaison to the NAC from 1948-1952. When Pennington left the FBI in late 1953, Legion officials immediately appointed him as the NAC’s director; and in 1955, he became head of the group’s Un-American Activities Office.<sup>76</sup>

State and local units also conducted anti-subversive activities, involving both training and intelligence gathering functions. The Illinois State Legion’s Anti-Subversive Commission, for example, held yearly seminars to train affiliates in fighting the communist menace, “inviting to Chicago the nation’s outstanding authorities on the subject.” Indianapolis, Indiana Post 312 began holding annual anti-subversive seminars in early 1955, which featured well-known anti-communists experts such as Senator McCarthy’s chief counsel, Roy M. Cohn. Affiliates apparently enthusiastically embraced counter-subversive training guidelines provided by national headquarters. As the national commander reported in 1955, “There is

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<sup>76</sup> Baarslag’s role, as noted by *U.S. News & World Report* was “to revitalize the anti-Communist campaign that the Legion carried on before World War Two.” Previous to his work in Naval Intelligence, Baarslag fought the Communist faction within his New York marine radio union; and after being defeated by them, his group joined the AFL. “Legion’s Red Chapters being Toned Down?,” *U.S. News & World Report*, June 12, 1953, 32; “No Let Down Against Reds,” *U.S. News and World Report*, July 24, 1953, 56-57; Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 44. On Pennington’s positions in the Legion, see, *New York Times*, November 19, 1953, 12; *ALM*, January 1954, 38; Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*, 217; *New York Times*, September, 15, 1955, 15.

every indication that the training program outlined in the manual is being put into operation in all parts of the country.” In New England, the Massachusetts Legion served as the central repository for “files of index cards and mimeographed dossiers,” concerning some 412 “suspected subversives” in the state, “and about fifty names from each of the other New England states.” As the *New York Times* reported, “the material had been gathered by the security officers of Legion posts throughout New England.” National headquarters staff sifted through this information as well. “Those [security] officers, officially known as chairmen of anti-subversive activities, send their material to the National Committee in Indianapolis for correlation.” These units also used their resources to aid the anti-subversive work of their state governments. In January 1954, for example, the Massachusetts Legion provided its files on subversives to assist the state’s “special legislative commission investigating communism.”<sup>77</sup>

The national Legion also sponsored a host of anti-subversive laws. The group strongly supported passage of the Internal Security Act of 1950 (or McCarran Act,) requiring Communist party members, and their front groups, to register with the Attorney General. In his September 1950 message to Congress vetoing the bill, President Truman, whose own loyalty-security programs had done much to advance the era’s repressive legal climate, voiced serious concerns over the measure’s potential to undermine civil liberties. The president’s main objection to the bill was that its definition of “communist fronts” could allow virtually any non-subversive

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<sup>77</sup>*New York Times*, December 8, 1959, 45. For Post 312’s counter-subversive seminar, *ALM*, February 1955, 40; on affiliates’ overall response to the counter-subversive training manual, see national commander Seaborn Collins’s report, in *Proceedings of 37<sup>th</sup> National Convention of the American Legion, Miami, FL*, October 10-13, 1955, published as *House Document No. 284*, 84<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2nd Session, 17; *New York Times*, January 30, 1954, 6.

group to be classed as a front, merely for supporting any part of a goal or position advanced by the Communist Party. In Truman's view, these provisions represented, "the greatest danger to freedom of speech, press, and assembly, since the Alien and Sedition Laws of 1798." The Legion's national commander, George Craig, harbored no such misgivings, and declared the Senate's vote over turning the president's veto, "[the] most encouraging news from Washington since VJ-Day." In recognition of the group's vigorous support of the bill, Senator Karl Mundt, one of its main sponsors, asked Truman to appoint a Legion-designated citizen-member to the Subversive Activities Control Board, the Act's administrative arm. In November 1950, frustrated by the Communist Party's legal appeals delaying implementation of the McCarran Act's registrations requirements, the Legion established the National Committee on Un-American Activities. The group, consisting of 139 attorneys and law enforcement officials belonging to the Legion, focused on helping federal authorities enforce the new law. In addition to cooperating with the FBI "to combat Communism," the Committee also provided legal assistance, "to those patriotic Americans who find themselves sued for libel after exposing Communists *and others* [my emphasis] who would subvert our way of life." Also, in June 1954, the Legion lobbied Congress "to outlaw the Communist party and all [of its] affiliated or subordinate organizations."<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> For discussion of the significance of Truman's 1947 loyalty-security program in laying the basis for the legal and political repression of the 1950s, see Ellen W. Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 4-5; and, Athan Theoharis, *Seeds of Repression: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of McCarthyism* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971). For Truman's veto message, see Schrecker, *The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History With Documents* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1994), 194-195. George Craig is quoted in *Los Angeles Times*, September 24, 1950, 25. For Mundt's request, see *Los Angeles Times*, October 12, 1950, 9. On the creation of the Legion's National Un-American Activities Committee, see *Los Angeles Times*, November 20, 1950, 19; and, *The Tennessee Legionnaire*, March 1951, 7. Richard Fried provides a succinct discussion of the actual failure of authorities to enforce the McCarran Act's registration requirements, and its mid-1960s demise in federal court rulings. Richard M. Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in*

State units also lobbied for anti-subversive legislation. In early 1951, the New York Legion pushed for stricter loyalty-security program requirements among state employees, and extension of the Feinberg Law, which subjected teachers in public schools and colleges to discharge on the grounds of membership in “subversive” organizations listed by the Board of Regents, to “all public employees.” The Indiana, New York, California and Pennsylvania units all pushed for state laws outlawing the Communist party. The Pennsylvania Legion’s legislative chairman initiated the 1951 Pechan Act, which imposed loyalty-oaths in the state’s higher education system. The Montana Legion sponsored the 1951 bill that established the state legislature’s un-American activities investigations committee.<sup>79</sup>

The Legion also sought measures intended to deny those charged with subversion of their constitutional guarantees to legal representation. Given the predominance of left-wing attorneys among those few even willing to represent such

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*Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press), 118. *New York Times*, June 10, 1954, 18. By the time the Legion lobbied to outlaw the CP, it had already been severely handicapped by federal prosecutions of its members. As Schrecker notes, “By the mid-1950s, American Communists had few rights that any official body had to respect.” Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*, 190. *New York Times*, June 10, 1954, 18. The Legion’s staunch support of the McCarran Act and similar measures reflected its interest in eliminating all so-called subversive groups from the body politic. In October 1950, the national convention called for outlawing the Communist party and “all subversive organizations and their front organizations or other groups who do *or may* [my emphasis] advocate the overthrow of our government by force or violence or any unlawful means.” It also urged that the federal government “take immediate steps for the internment of every known member of the Communist party in the United States.” *Proceedings of 32nd National Convention of the American Legion, Los Angeles, CA, October 9-12, 1950, 81st Congress, 2nd Session, published as House Document No. 734*, 26, 28.

<sup>79</sup> *New York Times*, January 31, 1951, 10; the specific terms of the Feinberg Law are in *New York Times*, February 4, 1956, 39; the state unit’s calls for outlawing the Communist Party are in: (Indiana) *Los Angeles Times*, February 23, 1951, 7; (New York) *New York Times*, July 18, 1953, 11; (California) *Los Angeles Times*, January 11, 1954, 5; and (Pennsylvania) *New York Times*, August 9, 1952, 4; on the Pechaern Act’s establishment, see Ellen W. Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower*, 115; for the Montana Legion’s efforts, see *ALM* May, 1953, 32.

defendants,<sup>80</sup> Legionnaires sought imposition of various national and state bar association sanctions on lawyers who defended accused subversives. In 1950, national convention delegates authorized all Legion units to lobby the American Bar Association “to file disbarment proceedings against those members in the National Lawyers Guild who follow the communist line.” At their 1955 convention, Legionnaires directed the National Legislative Commission to pursue measures requiring all attorneys practicing before federal courts, agencies and Congressional committees to file non-communist affidavits, with provisions for “criminal penalties and disbarment” for any “false” or “fraudulent” statements. The same convention mandate requested legislation to disbar lawyers who invoked the Fifth Amendment, “when questioned in any legal proceeding relative to any communist activity on his part.” Similarly, in March 1955, the California State Legion testified in favor of a proposed law put forth by a committee of the state bar association that would allow the disbarment of attorneys for, among other causes, invoking their Fifth Amendment privileges when questioned “about membership in subversive organizations, and the showing of disrespect to Congressional or other investigating committees.”<sup>81</sup> In short, the dual intent of such measures was to severely restrict the rights of both the accused and their attorneys.

As the U.S. Supreme Court rulings concerning the civil liberties of Communists took a more liberal direction under Chief Justice Earl Warren from 1955

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<sup>80</sup> On the difficulties Communists and accused subversives experienced in obtaining legal representation, and the political pressures their lawyers faced in representing them, see Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*, 301-305.

<sup>81</sup> *Proceedings of 37<sup>th</sup> National Convention of the American Legion, Miami, Florida, October 10-13, 1955, 84th Congress, 2nd Session, published as House Document No. 284, 50; New York Times*, March 20, 1955, 63.

onwards, the Legion joined with those seeking to neutralize the Court's authority. In February 1959, national commander Preston Moore announced the Legion's "full support" for the American Bar Association's resolution calling "for tightening subversion laws," passed in opposition to the Supreme Court's more liberal direction. The Legion also supported the State Department curbs on the right to travel, and its policy of refusing to issue passports on the basis of an applicant's political views. When the Supreme Court upheld these restrictions in April 1958, the Legion backed the early 1959 legislative initiatives of Mississippi Senator James O. Eastland to restore the withholding of passports from "Communist suspects."<sup>82</sup>

The notion that Communists and their sympathizers sought to subvert the minds of youth by infiltrating the educational system was of intense concern to the American Legion in the 1950s, ensuring that the schools became a major focal point of its Americanism program. As Eve Ashton, Americanism Committee chair of the National Auxiliary, observed in 1951, "Gaining control of our schools and colleges is another Communist goal. If they can control and color the education of our children, the future of America is indeed dark. We must see to it that our teachers and textbooks are soundly American, teaching our children to be free Americans, not preparing them to be puppets of a foreign dictator." Some of this work involved

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<sup>82</sup> Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*, 294-296, 352-353, 364; *New York Times*, February 27, 1959, 4. By halting the State Department's passport restrictions, in *Kent v. Dulles*, on the basis that they lacked statutory authority from Congress, the Court sidestepped the issue of whether they violated the Constitution. See the entry, *Kent v. Dulles* in, Kermit S. Hall, ed., *The Oxford Companion to the Supreme Court of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 558. For the Legion's support of Eastland's legislation, see *New York Times*, April 29, 1959, 25. For an extended discussion of the State Department's passport restrictions and the Supreme Court's interventions, see David Cauter, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 245-251. As Cauter notes, President Eisenhower, after *Kent*, also appealed to Congress for legislation to restore the passport restrictions, declaring that, "Each day that passes without it exposes us to great danger." Also, he notes that the Court of Appeals of the District of Columbia continued to deny passports by ruling "that geographical restrictions lay beyond judicial intervention." The Supreme Court, however, did not take up these cases. *Ibid.*, 250-251.

making sure students had access to patriotic reading materials in their school libraries. In early 1950, for example, 13 posts participated in the Orange County (CA) Legion Council's "book project," which placed texts celebrating "the stirring growth of the United States and its ideals," in area junior high schools. According to the project's organizing committee, the books were needed "to combat the Red-leanings of many of our educators... and...the flood of Socialist and Communistic literature which has found its way into our school libraries." The Americanism work of local Legion auxiliaries also included "donating anti-communist books to libraries and schools."<sup>83</sup>

To make the public schools "soundly American" as Ashton put it, the Legion also conducted campaigns to censor textbooks. In Peoria, Illinois, for example, the local post succeeded in 1952 in forcing the school board to remove Frank Abbott Magruder's *American Government* from the high schools, a textbook banned by many school boards across the country in the 1950s in response to widespread attacks by various conservative groups who labeled it "subversive." The school board responded to the Legion's attacks by setting up "a specially created teachers committee," which

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<sup>83</sup> Eve Ashton, "You Can Help Fight Communism in America," *National News of the American Legion Auxiliary*, January 1951, 7; on the Legion's Orange County's book project, see *Los Angeles Times*, January 29, 1950, B2; the role of local auxiliaries in distributing anti-communist books is in Report of the American Legion Auxiliary, in *Proceedings of 34<sup>th</sup> National Convention of the American Legion, New York, NY, August 25-28, 1952, 83rd Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, House Document 76*, 449. The Legion also initiated preventive measures among its sponsored Boys' State and Girls' State units. For example, the 1951 national convention recommended distribution of the publication *100 Things You Should Know About Communism* "to each and every youth who attends a Boys' State Conference in 1952 and for every ensuing year." *Proceedings of 31st National Convention of the American Legion, Los Angeles, CA, October 15-18, 1951, 82nd Congress, 2nd Session, published as House Document No. 313*, 42; *New York Times*, June 10, 1954, 18. Also, in 1958, the Mississippi Legion authorized extension of its Boys' and Girls' State programs to the county level, stating that, "it is a matter of utmost necessity that we must expand our youth training programs during these perilous times when the perpetuation of our American way of life is threatened by the teaching of Godless Isms." *The Mississippi Veteran*, August 1958, 5. The fear of Red subversion of the schools was widespread in the 1950s, especially among right-wing groups. For the problem in higher education, see Ellen W. Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). For the counter-subversive activities of various extreme Right organizations in the schools, see Stuart J. Foster, *Red Alert! Educators Confront the Red Scare in American Public Schools, 1947-1954* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2000).

recommended its retention, the post ignored this report, and aggressively pushed its campaign forward. As the *New Republic* characterized these efforts, “the American Legion is vigilant, intolerant and energetic in applying pressure against all who challenge its views.” After “a few weeks,” the school board capitulated, and “officially retired” the book from the curriculum. The Legion’s role in censoring textbooks continued well into the late 1950s. In September 1959, for example, the Mississippi Legion established a Textbook Study Committee to investigate the content of some 44 titles used in the state’s public school system after the Daughters of the American Revolution found them to be “unsatisfactory” for supporting the United Nations, labor unions and desegregation.<sup>84</sup>

Legionnaires also organized actions to remove teachers from the classroom whom they perceived as deviating from Americanism. In June 1958, for example, Hanover, (NJ) Legionnaires, along with local VFW units, publicly protested the continued employment of a high school teacher who had asked her students to critically examine the decision to drop the atomic bomb on Japan. Students had explored the issue by writing essays on that fateful event based on their reading of John Hershey’s *Hiroshima*. While the student papers took positions both for and against the bombing, the teacher permitted the school’s newspaper to publish three of the essays that opposed the decision. One student wrote, “I feel ashamed to call myself an American when I think this country of mine could do such damage to the

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<sup>84</sup> For an overview of the political and cultural repression that shaped the era, see Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), Chapter 1, esp. 11-17. For the Peoria campaign, see Loren Beth, “The Legion and the Library,” *New Republic*, July 14, 1952, 12. On the Right-wing’s crusade against Magruder’s textbook as subversive, see Stuart J. Foster, “Red Alert!”, 98-100. For the Mississippi Legion’s activities, see *New York Times*, September 6, 1959, 50; and, the editorial, “Scared Cows?” in *Mississippi Veteran*, May, 1960, 1.

humble Japanese.” The veterans’ units charged that the published essays were proof of the teacher’s un-American ideas, and that she had imposed her own views on the students. As the veterans publicly declared, the essays were “disrespectful to every loyal American.” The local Legion Auxiliary president also charged, as *New York Times* stated it, “that Miss Goodman was not fit to teach.” Although the school board subsequently cleared the teacher of “spreading un-Americanism,” and asked her “to withdraw her resignation,” she took a job at another school.<sup>85</sup>

Legionnaires also supported school board policies that removed “subversive” teachers for invoking their Fifth Amendment rights against self-incrimination during official probes into their political associations. In 1953, for example, two Philadelphia Legion posts, and the VFW, demanded that city school board officials summarily suspend or fire teachers who refused to give testimony to loyalty investigators. Similarly, in early February, 1955, the Kings County (NY) Legion backed a proposed city Board of Education rule to force teachers “called for questioning about Communist affiliations to name their former party associates,” under the threat of “dismissal after trial for insubordination.”<sup>86</sup>

As in the interwar years, efforts by Legionnaires to deprive educators of employment for holding “subversive” ideas also extended to higher education. for

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<sup>85</sup> The Hanover, NJ incident is covered in, *New York Times*, June 12, 1958, 33; *Ibid.*, June 19, 1958, 27; *Ibid.*, August 27, 1958, 32. The Legion’s determination to purge the public schools of un-American teachers was underscored by national commander Lewis K. Gough in a September, 1952 address to the California Savings and Loan League: “We shall continue our zealous vigilance to keep subversive textbooks out of our schools and to eliminate such individuals who do not teach true Americanism.” *Los Angeles Times*, September 11, 1952, 9.

<sup>86</sup> As Schrecker notes, for example, the New York City Board of Higher Education made use of (city charter) Section 903, which mandated dismissal of any employee for refusal to give testimony, as an instrument to fire left-wing teachers invoking the Fifth Amendment in Congressional communism investigations. The Supreme Court eventually struck down Section 903 in May 1956 as being wholly inconsistent with Fifth Amendment self-incrimination guarantees. Ellen W. Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower*, 169, esp. 170-171. On the Philadelphia Legion posts’ demands, see *New York Times*, November 21, 1953, 6. For the proposed NYC regulation, see *New York Times*, February 25, 1955, 9.

example, starting in late 1951, the Westchester County (NY) Legion maintained a seven-year campaign against Sarah Lawrence College, demanding that officials answer its charges of Communist associations among certain faculty, and specifically that it dismiss three professors. The Legionnaires also issued calls for outside groups to boycott speaking engagements by the college's president, and demanded that HUAC investigate the institution. Additionally, the New York Legion succeeded in having two Republican legislators introduce its bill to extend the state's Feinberg Law provisions, authorizing discharge of public school faculty belonging to "subversive" organizations, to private institutions. Professors who defended civil liberties on campus also faced harassment. In August 1952, the Queens County, (NY) Legion, joined by Catholic War Veterans, hurled public condemnations at Queens College's Professor Harold Lenz, for simply voicing his opposition to a resolution placed before the Board of Higher Education to prohibit the Communist Party from using school buildings.<sup>87</sup>

The efforts of Legionnaires to bar "subversives" from appearances on college campuses also resulted in numerous assaults on free speech. In early 1956, the Illinois State Legion sought to block Nobel prize-winning scientist Linus Pauling from lecturing at the University of Illinois, by bringing his previous appearance before a Senate loyalty hearing to the attention of campus officials. The effort failed when the university, acting on the Legion's request to "more carefully" examine Pauling's past,

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<sup>87</sup> For examples of Legionnaires interwar period protests leading to dismissals of liberal and left professors, see Pencak, *For God and Country*, 269-270. On the Legion's various actions against Sarah Lawrence, see Shrecker, *No Ivory Tower*, 213; *New York Times*, November 14, 1958, 11; boycotts, see *New York Times*, December 8, 1954, 9; HUAC probe, see *New York Times*, May 15, 1952, 29; Feinburg Law extension bill, see *New York Times*, February 4, 1956, 39. For the attacks on Lenz, see *New York Times*, August 9, 1952, 10.

released its report stating he was “loyal to America.” When Baltimore College invited Asia expert Owen Lattimore to speak in early 1951, falsely identified as a Soviet agent by McCarthy a year earlier, the Legion successfully pressured the Baltimore City Council to ask the school board prevent his appearance. The board, however, halted the Legion’s campaign when it refused to implement the Council’s request. In 1952, Legion Post 16 in Huntington, West Virginia temporarily succeeded in having Marshall College cancel guest lectures by Professors Max Lerner and Paul Engle, on the basis that HUAC had cited them “as...supporters of Communist fronts.” While Marshall officials later rescinded their decision, their initial response (like the Baltimore City Council decision) revealed the Legion’s power to exert its influence in such cases. The New Jersey Legion also opposed the speaking engagement of Alger Hiss at Princeton in April 1956.<sup>88</sup>

Beyond the realm of education, the Legion also regularly attacked the speech and assembly rights of a range of liberal and left individuals and groups. In April 1952, the Los Angeles County Legion opposed giving a permit for a public meeting in a high school that included the presence of two Communist speakers. In a school board hearing to decide the issue, local Legionnaires insisted that the permit should be revoked, “in the interest of Americanism,” and let it be known that, “we intend to

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<sup>88</sup> *New York Times*, March 3, 1956, 11. The Lattimore protest is in *New York Times*, March 8, 1951, 16. Lattimore was one of several figures McCarthy initially targeted as among the alleged “communist” agents in the State Department supposedly behind what he and his conservative allies termed the “loss” of China to communism under President Truman’s leadership. See David M. Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joseph McCarthy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 136-138, and Chapter 10. The Marshall College case is in *New York Times*, November 19, 1952, 36. It is not clear why Marshall reversed its decision. For opposition to Hiss speaking at Princeton, see *New York Times*, April 13, 1956, 19. Among veterans’ organizations, the Legion was not alone in these attacks. In April 1958, the VFW’s District of Columbia Department excoriated Howard University officials for sponsoring a speech on campus by Dr. W.E.B. Dubois, in honor of his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, since it regarded him as “a Communist sympathizer.” *The Afro-American*, April 19, 1958, 5.

have a picket line out there.” Despite free speech arguments presented by the Metropolitan League and the area’s American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), school board officials cancelled the event when the county attorney warned of its potential disruptive effects at the school, including property damage. Similarly, in October 1951, local hotel officials reneged on the rental of their ballroom by the Westchester (NY) Human Rights Committee’s when confronted by protests from the local Legion, which denounced the group as “pro-Communists.” The Legionnaires also targeted the group’s scheduled speaker, Carey McWilliams, associate editor of *Nation* magazine. Westchester County officials and “several organizations,” also refused to grant rental space to the group. Liberal church groups were also targeted. In September 1951, Evanston, Illinois Legionnaires, and the Cook County Legion Council, demanded that First Methodist Church officials refuse to allow the Methodist Federation for Social Action to meet in their building, basing their protest on a HUAC report, which claimed the group “had exerted influence ‘on behalf of Communist causes and the Communist line.’” (The church eventually rebuffed the Legion).<sup>89</sup>

As the country’s leading defender of the rights of radicals and other dissenters since the WWI-era Red Scare, the ACLU sustained some of the Legion’s heaviest assaults on liberal organizations in the 1950s. Since the interwar period, both

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<sup>89</sup> *New York Times*, September 5, 1951, 37; *Los Angeles Times* April 1, 1952, 1. The Westchester Legionnaires were supported by Rabbi Benjamin Schultz, representing the Joint Committee Against Communism in New York, which other veterans’ organizations belonged to. As the *Times* reported, Schultz stated his group “included members of the Legion, Catholic War Veterans, Jewish War Veterans, Amvets, and the VFW [my abbrev.]” *New York Times*, October 16, 1951, 25; on the refusal of Westchester county officials and other unspecified organizations to provide a hall to the Committee, see *New York Times*, November 8, 1951, 31. *New York Times*, September 5, 1951, 37. Right-wing anti-communists had attacked the Methodist Federation for Social Action, a long-established social justice organization, as an alleged Communist front since the 1930s. In the 1950s, the Houston, Texas Legion led a coalition of right-wing Red Scare groups against the MFSA. See Don E. Carleton, *Red Scare!: Right-wing Hysteria, Fifties Fanaticism and Their Legacy in Texas*, (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1985), 102-110.

organizations clashed over the definition of Americanism, and the Legion regarded the ACLU's defense of Communists and other radicals as evidence that it functioned as their front group. Even though in early 1953, the ACLU officially adopted an anti-Communist stance to shield itself against McCarthyism, this action, along with its retreat from defending the rights of Communists, did nothing to halt the Legion's onslaughts. Beginning in 1952, and in successive national conventions, the Legion called upon federal authorities to "investigate (and expose) the questionable record of subversive activities of the ACLU [my abbrev.]...and its personnel." In May 1957, Clark Foreman, Director of the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee, (formed six years earlier by activists wanting a more aggressive defense of civil liberties than the ACLU was providing), reported that, "in recent weeks," New York City hotels "owing to pressure from the American Legion" had canceled meeting rooms to his group and the ACLU.<sup>90</sup>

In November 1953, the Indiana Legion initiated a major attack on the ACLU that drew national attention when it successfully blocked the Indiana Civil Liberties chapter, (ICLU) from holding an organizing meeting in the Indiana War Memorial auditorium (IWM) in downtown Indianapolis. Despite being a public institution, the IWM's board denied the ICLU use of the facility, citing a rule against meetings of "a

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<sup>90</sup> On the Legion's conflicts with the ACLU during the WWI-era Red Scare and interwar years, see Pencak, *For God and Country*, 8-9, 15-16, 155, 157. For discussion of how the national ACLU's anti-Communist policies compromised its civil libertarian commitments in the 1950s, including its refusals to defend actual and alleged Communists, such as the Rosenbergs and Owen Lattimore, see Judy Kutulas, *The American Civil Liberties Union and the Making of Modern Liberalism, 1930-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 194-195, 198, 145, 181, 182. For the Legion's calls for federal investigations of the ACLU, see (quoted) Resolution No. 231, in *Proceedings of the 34<sup>th</sup> National Convention of the American Legion, New York, NY, August 25-28, 1952*, published as *House Document, No. 76*, 83<sup>rd</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 29; and also, *New York Times*, September 4, 1953, 7; and, *New York Times*, September 3, 1954, 10. See Foreman's letter to the editor, "Controversy Curb" in *New York Times*, May 12, 1957, SM4. As Judy Kutulas notes, civil libertarians, including prominent ACLU members, who felt the national ACLU was failing to fully uphold its mission formed the ECLC in 1951. See Kutulas, *The American Civil Liberties Union*, 185-186.

political or controversial nature,” after it received protests from the Indiana Legion, and the far-right Minute Women, claiming the ACLU was a “Communist front,” with a “long history of unbroken and undeviating defense of Communist and Communist causes.” The ensuing debate over the civil liberties issues raised by the ban reached a national television audience on November 24, 1953, when Edward R. Murrow featured the affair on his CBS program *See It Now*, which had recently begun the process of using television to focus public attention on the abuses of McCarthyism.<sup>91</sup>

As both sides publicly contested use of the war memorial, they mobilized their conflicting understandings of Americanism, patriotism and the Cold War. Indiana Legionnaires used their participation in Murrow’s program to bolster their charges that the ACLU was a subversive organization. They characterized the ACLU’s defense of left-wing union leader Harry Bridges against government deportation for his political views, as a betrayal of the nation’s Cold War struggle against communism. As one Legionnaire, noted, “An organization which gives aid and comfort to anyone such as Bridges does not belong in Indiana.” Legionnaires contrasted the patriotic meanings they ascribed to the war memorial to the ACLU’s

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<sup>91</sup>For the general facts of the case and the Communist front charge, see ACLU press releases, November 17, 1953, November 19, 1953 and December 14, 1953, in American Civil Liberties Union Records, Series 3., Subject Files, Subseries., Assembly and Public Protest, box 751, folder 6: Misc. War Memorial Auditorium Indianapolis Ban on ACLU Mtg., 1953-1954, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, (hereinafter ACLU Records, Ser. 3, Subject Files, Folder 6, ML). The protest letters are quoted in, *New York Times*, November 18, 1953, 26. For the Minute Women’s far-right identity and activities generally, see Carleton, *Red Scare!*, 111-134. The text of the IWM board’s ruling is in, *Hoosier Legionnaire*, December, 1953, 5. For the Murrow program, see Transcript of “Show #10, “The Argument in Indianapolis,” *See It Now* broadcast, November 24, 1953, ACLU Records, Ser. 3, Subject Files, Box 751, folder 6, ML. Murrow’s focus on the Legion-ACLU controversy came a month after his *See It Now* program first exposed the abusive effects of McCarthyism in the military’s loyalty-security program, by bringing to light the case of Lt. Milo Radulovich. The broadcast’s exposure of the military’s guilt by association case against Radulovich generated enough public outrage to cause the Air Force to drop its charges and reinstate him. See Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*, 292; and, David M. Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense*, 397-398.

supposed un-American defense of the civil liberties of Communists. As Indiana Legion commander Roy Amos told viewers, “The American Legion can never agree that the Indiana War Memorial is a fitting place for a meeting of the ACLU [my abbrev.] The Memorial is hallowed ground. It is a shrine sacred to the memory of thousands of Hoosier patriots, many of whom died in Korea fighting Communism. As such, it must never be used as a sounding board for the advocacy of any policy of pampering Communists to the virtual exclusion of all others.”<sup>92</sup>

The national ACLU sought to defend its claim to use the war memorial by directly rebutting the Legion’s Communist front charges. It did so, in part, by claiming the mantle of anticommunism. “The Legion should know that since 1940 the ACLU has faithfully practiced its resolution barring Communists and other totalitarians from its staff and governing councils.” Also, using liberal Cold War Americanism discourse to criticize the IWM board’s rationale for denying access, the group represented its desire to meet in the memorial as consistent with American democratic ideals, while it depicted the Legion’s position as promoting values that the nation’s Cold War enemies found compatible. “Controversial discussion is as American as the Fourth of July. It is the heart of our democracy. The freedom to discuss all issues, controversial or not, is one of the main things that makes us different from—and better than—totalitarian Communism. It is unfortunate that the local branch of the American Legion does not realize this.”<sup>93</sup>

Prior to the Murrow broadcast, the *New York Times* defended the ACLU by reminding the IWM board, Legionnaires and the Minute Women that “They ought to

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<sup>92</sup> Transcript of Show #10, “The Argument in Indiana,” *See It Now* broadcast, November 24, 1953, 7, 10, ACLU Records, Ser 3. Subject Files, box 751, folder 6, ML.

<sup>93</sup> ACLU press release, November 17, 1953, *Ibid.*, box 751, folder 6, ML.

know that a proposed ACLU meeting on civil liberties...is an expression of Americanism, the antithesis of communism.” Further, it conflated the ACLU’s fight to enter the memorial with the sacrifices the structure commemorated. “They ought to know that the American boys who have died in the three great wars of this generation died for liberty and for freedom. To bar the War Memorial to defenders of freedom is not far short of sacrilege toward the dead.” The IWM board remained unmoved by such arguments. In May 1954, it blocked the ICLU from convening in the memorial with its guest speaker Studebaker Corporation chairman Paul Hoffman, who was to speak on the topic of “Free Enterprise and How to Preserve It.” The board held to its decision, even though it took no action the previous June to halt the appearance of a speaker in the memorial, “who talked in defense of the Rosenbergs.” In August 1957, the IWM board once again refused to permit the ICLU to hold its Bill of Rights Day celebration in the facility, citing a HUAC report stipulating that its parent body was “a defender of Communists.” Despite years of ongoing efforts to end the board’s ban, the ICLU finally gained access to the memorial following a favorable ruling from the Indiana Supreme Court in 1973.<sup>94</sup>

The Legion also played a major role in curtailing civil liberties in the Hollywood film industry. Its influence was initially felt after HUAC completed its first postwar investigations of communism in the industry in late 1947. Concerned that the negative publicity and growing anti-Communist agitation surrounding the

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<sup>94</sup> See the editorial, “Incident in Indianapolis” in *New York Times*, November 19, 1953, 30. On the board’s 1954 actions, see *New York Times* May 21, 1954, 5; and, the editorial, “Liberty in Indianapolis,” *New York Times*, May 21, 1954, 26. Also, in August 1954, the IWM board approved new rules banning groups “listed as subversive or as Communist ‘fronts’.” *New York Times*, August 17, 1954, 17. For discussion of the Indiana Supreme Court’s 1973 ruling, and the events leading up to it by ACLU activists involved in the legal struggle, see the ICLU’s pamphlet, *To Hire a Hall*, (Indianapolis: The Indiana Civil Liberties Union, October, 1973), in ACLU Records, Ser. Affiliates, box 470, folder 4: Indiana, 1972-1977.

hearings could harm box office revenues, the major studios immediately issued their pledge, or “the Waldorf Statement,” to blacklist Communists from employment. Both the Legion and the Hearst newspapers led these initial calls for action against communism in the industry. In urging industry executives to adopt the blacklist, Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) president Eric Johnston warned them of the Legion’s threat to organize boycotts against film companies employing Communists.<sup>95</sup>

The Legion assumed a more direct role in advancing the anti-Communist campaign in Hollywood at the end of 1951, as HUAC concluded the first year of its new round of investigations of communism in the film industry. In February 1952, HUAC released its finding that Hollywood, despite its Waldorf Statement, had failed to rid itself fully of Communist influence. In December 1951, acting on its recent national convention mandate to use the *American Legion Magazine* to “condemn, expose and combat” entertainers with connections to Communist front groups, the Legion published an article by the leading anti-Communist J.B. Matthews, which supplemented HUAC’s charges. The article claimed that the film industry remained riddled with screenwriters, actors and other employees having affiliations to Communist fronts. It listed these employees’ names, their alleged front group ties and

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<sup>95</sup> The Fund for the Republic’s 1956 study of Hollywood blacklisting underscored the Legion’s considerable role: “The Legion had not merely been ‘linked’ with events in Hollywood—in many respects it had become their prime mover.” Robert M. Lichtman, “J.B. Matthews and the ‘Counter-subversives’: Names as a Political and Financial Resource in the McCarthy Era,” *American Communist History* 5 (2006): footnote 44, 20. Fear of economic losses resulting from the HUAC hearings was considerable. As Ellen Shrecker has noted, “the studio heads were sensitive to anything that might offend their potential customers.” Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*, 327. For text of the Waldorf Statement, see Schrecker, *The Age of McCarthyism*, 215-216. The blacklist initially targeted the so-called Hollywood Ten, consisting of current and past CP members, Richard M. Fried, *Nightmare in Red*, 77-78. For mention of the Legion and Hearst papers as the leading forces behind the anti-Communist drive in Hollywood, and Johnston’s inclusion of the Legion’s boycott threat to promote the blacklist policy, see Larry Ceplair and Steven Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community, 1930-1960* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1980), 328-329.

activities, and the studios and current films that employed them. Following the article's release, the film industry found itself the target of protests by Legionnaires, who setup picket lines at movie theaters showing the listed films. Initially, the MPAA's Eric Johnston rebuffed HUAC's February report, including its charge that Communists were attempting to influence film content. "As there is no un-Americanism in our pictures," Johnston declared, "the Committee should do the fair...thing and stop this accusation." The industry's defiant stance, however, soon crumpled as it considered the potential threat to box office sales posed by the Legion's publicity attacks and its potential to expand boycott and picketing activity by its nearly 3 million members, especially in light of already sagging revenues and increased competition from television. As the *New Republic's* Phil Kerby reported, Johnston's response to HUAC revealed, "responsible film industry leaders do not consider Communism a present threat in Hollywood. But they are afraid, mortally so, of the harm that can come to the industry by the manipulation of the fear of communism." In an effort to contain the Legion, the eight major studios, led by Eric Johnston, reversed course and convened a late March 1952 meeting with national commander Donald Wilson to devise a means of addressing the group's charges of continued Communist influence.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> On HUAC's reopening of its Hollywood investigations, Shrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*, 329; on HUAC's February 1952 report, Phil Kerby, "The Legion Blacklist," *New Republic* June 16, 1952, 14. See Resolution No. 2, in *Proceedings of the 33rd National Convention of the American Legion, Miami, FL*, October 15-18, 82nd Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, published as *House Document No. 313*, 40. For Matthews's article, see J.B. Matthews, "Did the Movies Really Clean House?" *American Legion Magazine*, December, 1951, 12-13, 49-56. For Matthews's standing as a leading right-wing anti-communist, see, Ceplair and Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood*, 389; and, Lichtman, "J.B. Matthews and the 'Counter-subversives'" *American Communist History* 5 (2006): 2-3. Johnston's response to HUAC's February report and Kerby's comments on it are quoted in, Kerby, "The Legion Blacklist," 14. For comment on the film industry's economic distresses in the early 1950s, and its resulting fear of Legion pressure tactics, see Ellen Schrecker, *The Age of McCarthyism*, 79. For

Under the terms of the plan worked out with Wilson on March 31, 1952, the Legion supplied the film executives with the names of 300 film industry personnel (to be used by the studios to screen employees for their loyalty) composing its so-called graylist, meaning liberals and fellow travelers that it had identified as having, at some time, membership or association in a Communist front group. The studios' administration of the Legion's graylist paralleled procedures used in the "clearing," or rehabilitation, of blacklisted individuals (persons who had defied HUAC by invoking the Fifth Amendment or not appearing to testify). To justify retaining their jobs, the studios required graylisted personnel to submit letters of contrition for their alleged front group affiliations, with sufficient explanations to persuade their employers that they were loyal Americans. Such employees subsequently endured additional degrading stages of review by so-called "clearing agents." These included officials of the conservative Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals and the Legion's publications director James F. O'Neil, who scrutinized the documents to determine whether an individual's rehabilitation warranted final approval. That the Legion's intervention helped to undercut the rights of graylisted personnel to hold a job, irrespective of their individual beliefs and opinions, was not lost on its critics. As the *New Republic* observed, "No sooner had the lists reached the inner sanctums of

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additional mention of the studio executives' fears of the Legion's power to mobilize against them, see Ceplair and Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood*, 392; Victor S. Navasky, *Naming Names*, (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2003), 86; and Kirby, "The Legion Blacklist," 14-15. Ceplair and Englund, in *The Inquisition in Hollywood*, 389, point out that Matthews's article "precipitated" the studios' March 1952 meeting with the Legion. For reportage of the Legion's focus on Hollywood following HUAC's 1951 investigations see, *New York Times*, April 1, 1952, 35; *Ibid.*, April 6, 1952, X5; *Ibid.*, May, 24, 1952, A1; *Ibid.*, May 27, 1952, 13; *Ibid.*, April, 29, 1953, 35; and, *Los Angeles Times*, May, 24, 1952, A1. In August 1952, the California Amvets also called upon studio executives "to sign a pledge that they will not employ any persons who refuse to respond to the HUAC [my abbrev.] or any other duly constituted government agency investigating charges of alleged subversive activities involving Hollywood personalities." *New York Times* August 5, 1952, 16.

the sprawling movie lots than the studios began a widespread ‘loyalty’ screening process.”<sup>97</sup>

The power of the Legion to compel the Hollywood film industry to cooperate with its anti-subversion efforts was further demonstrated by the success of its aggressive boycott campaign against the distribution of Charlie Chaplin’s film *Limelight*. Following the Attorney General’s statement in late September 1952, declaring that he would block any reentry of Chaplin (a British citizen) to the U.S. pending an Immigration Service investigation of both his moral character and alleged ties to the Communist Party, the Legion demanded a boycott of his films until he cleared himself of the government’s charges. The National Executive Committee’s (NEC) October 1952 resolution authorizing the boycott urged all film distributors to “withhold” *Limelight*, and emphasized the Legionnaires displeasure over Chaplin’s “views of personal morality,” and what they viewed as his un-Americanism. On the latter point, the resolution specifically targeted his failure to become a U. S. citizen and his, “contemptuous attitude toward American patriotism.” Local Legionnaires picketing theaters showing *Limelight* in Los Angeles attacked Chaplin’s Americanism by drawing attention to his alleged support of Communist front organizations, his problems with the Attorney General, and his failure to join other Hollywood actors in Korea to entertain the troops. Increasingly pressured by Legion picketing and threats

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<sup>97</sup> For the distinctions between the blacklist and graylist, and the similar clearance procedures under them, see Ceplair and Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood*, 387-388; 392-393, 394. The workings of the clearance system developed between the studios and the Legion are discussed in Ceplair and Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood*, 392, 393-394; and, Robert Pitkin, “The Movies and the American Legion,” *ALM*, May 1953, 39, 41-43; and, Navasky, *Naming Names*, 89-90. On the clearing agent roles of the Motion Picture Alliance and James O’Neil respectively, see Ceplair and Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood*, 386; and, Cate, *The Great Fear*, 504. Kerby, “The Legion Blacklist,” *New Republic*, June 16, 1952, 14.

of such actions, the big theater chains around the country began to halt their distribution of the film.<sup>98</sup>

Appalled by the negative implications of the Legion's attack on Chaplin for civil liberties, some individuals attempted to undercut the boycott by invoking liberal Americanism and Cold War rhetoric. In early February, *Commonweal* cited a disregard for due process when it derided movie houses for aiding the boycott by canceling *Limelight* in advance of Chaplin's reentry hearing. "The theaters, it would seem, have...subscribed to an assumption increasingly evident behind a type of neo-patriotism for which the Legion has become a leading spokesman, ...that a man on whom suspicion of disloyalty has fallen is guilty until he is proved innocent." A number of letters to the editor focused on the Legion's actions as undemocratic and authoritarian. One *Washington Post* reader, for example, depicted protesting Legionnaires as "self-appointed vigilantes." A *New York Times* reader asked "What right does this group have to limit through coercion the freedom of their fellow-citizens?" "The American Legion," Mrs. Robert Ross informed the *Washington Post*, "is taking the same stand as the Nazi storm troopers...If the American public lets the Legion, in the guise of American patriotism, get away with it, we can expect to see troops of Legionnaires march into our libraries, schools and colleges, confiscate the

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<sup>98</sup> For discussion of Chaplin's morals charges, the Attorney General's statement, and some discussion of the Legion's campaign against Chaplin's films, see Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press), 187-189. The NEC's resolution is partially quoted in *Los Angeles Times*, October 13, 1952, 16. For a good overview of the Legion's boycott campaign, see William Murray, "'Limelight,' Chaplin and His Censors," *The Nation*, March 21, 1953, 247-248. For the issues Los Angeles Legionnaires targeted in their protests, see *Los Angeles Times*, February 19, 1953, 19. As some of their protests signs declared, "Hollywood actors entertained troops in World War I. Hollywood actors entertained troops in World War II. Hollywood actors are in Korea. Where has Chaplin been all this time?", *Ibid.* For reports of mid-January cancellations by Fox West Coast Theaters in Los Angeles and the Loew's theater Chapter in New York City, see *Los Angeles Times*, January 16, 1953, 2; and, *New York Times*, January 16, 1953, 18.

books they object to, and burn them in the public squares of our towns.” The *Washington Post*, in late January 1953, held that the Legion’s application of a political test to Chaplin’s “artistic achievements is to embrace one of the ugliest aspects of communism. Behind the Iron Curtain, artists are judged exclusively on the basis of their political orthodoxy; and no one may write or act or paint or play music unless he satisfies some official censor. But happily this has not been, at least until lately, the American way.” Also in late January, the *New York Times* concluded, “If this whole business of prejudgment, pressures and, what is worse, knuckling under to these pressures doesn’t smack of un-Americanism, we would like to know what does.”<sup>99</sup>

As these critics implied, the Legion’s campaign resulted not only in an un-American destruction of civil liberties, but in mimicking tactics used by the Nazis and its Iron Curtain enemies, the Legion was weakening American ideals defended in both the last war, and in the present Cold War. It was the Legion’s actions, not Chaplin’s, that were undermining America’s position vis-à-vis its Cold War opponents.

In defending their picketing of two Washington, D.C. theaters showing *Limelight* in late February 1953, local Legionnaires, aggressively denounced their critics’ charges. They argued that it was not their protests, but Chaplin’s Communist front activities, funded by his film profits, that threatened freedom. By picketing his

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<sup>99</sup> “The Process of Dissolution,” *Commonweal*, February 6, 1953, 441; see letter to the editor, Herbert A. Tiedemann, “Advice to Pickets,” *Washington Post & Times Herald*, February 25, 1953, 12; letter to the editor, Joseph M. Duffy, Jr. “Coercion,” *New York Times*, February 8, 1953, X5; letter to the editor, Mrs. Robert Ross, “‘Limelight’ and the Legion,” *Washington Post & Times Herald*, February 9, 1953, 8; see the editorial, “The Legion and ‘Limelight’,” *Washington Post & Times Herald*, January 31, 1953, 8; see the editorial, “Attack on Freedom,” *New York Times*, January 26, 1953, 18.

films, they claimed they were defending American liberty against Communist subversion by disrupting the flow of cash to the front groups. As the D.C. Department's "open letter" to Chaplin declared, "you have given aid and comfort to 11 organizations which have been officially cited as fronts for and sympathizers with as malevolent a creed as ever threatened freedom and decency in the whole history of mankind." The Legionnaires also maintained that by opposing the purpose of their picketing and defending Chaplin's freedom of expression, their critics were also complicit in aiding America's Cold War adversaries. As the unit's Americanism chairman told the *Washington Post*, "We feel that an informed public will refuse...to support his Commie-front prestige and bank roll any longer. Your condonement [sic] of the accrual of wealth to Chaplin in the United States is tantamount to advocacy of trading with the enemy." Further, the unit implied that concern for Chaplin's right not to have his film work judged on political grounds, as the *Washington Post* maintained, betrayed the troops at the front, and therefore subverted the war effort. "To approach Chaplin and *Limelight* from an artistic viewpoint is to denounce America's responsibility to her sons in arms." Despite the protestations of its critics, the Legion's national campaign against Chaplin proved highly successful. Widespread capitulations to the Legion by film distributors and theaters, as Stephen Whitfield has noted, ensured that "Limelight was shown in relatively few cities."<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> The District of Columbia Department's "open letter" to Chaplin is quoted in, *Washington Post & Times Herald*, February 20, 1953, 3; see letter to the editor, Elwood Jarnagin, Chairman Americanism Commission, Department of the District of Columbia, "Chaplin and the Legion," *Washington Post & Times Herald*, February 19, 1953, 16. The idea that support of Chaplin's freedom of expression contravened, and therefore undercut, the troops' mission in Korea also came out in the joint press statement issued by the DC Legion and the other local veterans' groups (specifically, the VFW, Amvets, Catholic War Veterans, Jewish War Veterans, Disabled Veterans of America, and the Legion's Auxiliary) who met to discuss their opposition to the showing of *Limelight*. As they declared, "It is unthinkable that the American public should insure his continued financial success by box office

The Legion's efforts to pressure Hollywood studios to maintain employment sanctions against alleged subversives persisted into the late 1950s. In June 1959, the California State Legion convention went on the attack with a resolution that declared, "the American public is witnessing the re-infiltration of the motion-picture industry by communist and their fellow travelers." The convention also denounced the decision of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, earlier in the year, to end its ban on awarding Oscars to Communists. By early July, the California unit began work on a list of subversives to back up its charges. In September, the national convention passed two resolutions pertaining to filmmakers; one lauded those major studios that continued to enforce the Waldorf Statement, while the other attacked independent producers "who have [employed] communist and communist sympathizers." It was this latter group that became the Legion's primary focus.<sup>101</sup>

Following the convention, the national organization wasted no time in targeting the independent producers. As national commander Martin B. McKneally declared in early February 1960, the Legion "was opening a 'war of information,' to combat 'a renewed invasion of American filmdom by Soviet-indoctrinated artists.'"

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support of his films. American young men on the battlefields of Korea are certainly entitled to the assurance that Americans back home no longer tolerate the Chaplins and their kind." See *Washington Post & Times Herald*, February 1, 1953, M18. The DC Legion also used the occasion to announce its intention to picket local theaters that showed the film. *Ibid.* For the national impact of the boycott, see Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, 189; and, William Murray's March 21 report, which also noted, "By now 'Limelight' in the normal course of events should have been shown in approximately 2, 500 theaters throughout the country. On February 15 it had been shown in only about 150. The power of an ignorant and irresponsible censorship has been demonstrated." Murray, "'Limelight' Chaplin and His Censors," *The Nation*, March 21, 248.

<sup>101</sup> On the Legion's "re-infiltration charges," see *New York Times*, June 30, 1959, 28; *Ibid.*, July 1, 1959, 27; *Ibid.* July 3, 1959, 8; *Ibid.*, July 7, 1959, 36; *Ibid.*, July 12, 1959, X5; *Ibid.*, July 17, 1959, 10. The Academy's Oscar policy is discussed in, *New York Times*, June 30, 1959, 28. The national convention's targeting of independent film producers led some in that group to suggest that the major studios cut a deal, in which they pledged to fully uphold the Waldorf agreement if the Legion confined its focus on the independents. *New York Times*, September 3, 1959, 30; and *New York Times*, September 6, 1959, X7; for the national convention resolutions, see *ALM*, October 1959, 37.

The Legion directed its campaign primarily against independent filmmakers Sidney Kramer, Kirk Douglas and Otto Preminger, who openly employed blacklisted screenwriters. For his part, Kramer refused to accede to the national Legion's demand, in early February 1960, that he fire screenwriter Nedrick Young, who, in 1953, had declined to answer a HUAC inquiry as to whether he was a Communist. In defying the Legion, Kramer drew heavily upon the liberal anti-Communist discourse, drawing attention to the undemocratic and anti-civil libertarian nature of the organization's practices. "The American Legion," he stated, "is weighing a procedure in which, literally, the ends justify the means. This is totally un-American as anything I can imagine." The Legion responded by casting its methods as open and democratic, while implying that Kramer's approach to hiring Young was in keeping with Communist tactics. As McKneally declared, "the American Legion will not cooperate with Mr. Kramer or anyone else in a conspiracy of silence, nor accept it as good Americanism to deceive the public and conceal facts from the people. We cannot see on what basis Mr. Kramer finds it 'reprehensible' for us to tell the American people what appears in Congressional documents concerning Nedrick Young." During a televised debate with Kramer in mid-February, McKneally also insisted that "the movie industry should not employ a communist or anyone who has sought refuge behind the Fifth Amendment when questioned about subversive associations, unless he recants." Kramer responded, in part, with an unequivocal defense of Fifth Amendment rights for all persons, regardless of their individual political beliefs. He also countered McKneally's emphasis on Young's subversive background by saying that his decision to employ him was a thoroughly American

act, both democratic and according to the tenets of free enterprise. “I am in an art form. I think the artist must have a freedom of expression. Beyond that, as an individual entrepreneur, I must have the right to hire and fire according to the dictates of my conscience.”<sup>102</sup>

While Kramer continued to defy the Legion, the group, along with the Hearst papers, conducted a successful campaign to pressure Frank Sinatra to fire the blacklisted Hollywood Ten screenwriter Albert Maltz, whom he had hired for his independent film production, *The Execution of Private Slovik*. Initially, Sinatra resisted the Legion’s demands. In a late March 1960 statement published in *Daily Variety*, he defended Maltz. “Under our Bill of Rights I was taught that no one may prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, religion, or other matters.” Yet about a week later, he reversed course and fired Maltz from the film project. In explaining his decision, Sinatra made it appear to be a democratic response on his part. “I had thought that the major consideration was whether or not the resulting script would be in the best interests of the United States... But the American public has indicated it feels the morality of hiring Albert Maltz is the more crucial matter and I will accept this majority opinion.” Well into 1960, California Legionnaires continued their campaign against employing blacklisted writers. In December 1960, Legionnaires from ten Los Angeles posts picketed the Hollywood premier of Otto Preminger’s *Exodus*, denouncing the author of the script, Hollywood Ten member Dalton Trumbo.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> *New York Times*, February 8, 1960, 1; *New York Times*, February 10 1960, 42; *New York Times*, February 15, 1960, 22.

<sup>103</sup> On Kramer’s ongoing resistance to the Legion, see *New York Times*, May 3, 1960, 43. For the campaign against Sinatra, which included a call by the California Legion’s Counter-Subversive

Legionnaires launched similar actions of intimidation against theatrical stage and other performers aimed at denying them the opportunity to earn a living. Syracuse, NY's Astor Theater closed its planned season of stage productions in November 1953, when its lead actor quit after producers received a letter from the Onondaga County Legion identifying him as subversive. Pennsylvania State University officials cancelled an appearance by dancer Paul Draper in July 1955, after "a meeting with state Legion officials who submitted information allegedly linking Mr. Draper with Communists fronts." In late 1953, Las Vegas's Sands Hotel likewise cancelled Larry Adler's harmonica act based upon "public opinion," and receipt of a telegram from the Illinois Legion's Anti-Subversive Commission stating that he, "has never made satisfactory answer to Red charges." Adler attempted to defend himself by pointing out that in 1951, he was, "'cleared for troop entertainment in Korea,'" but to no avail. Draper again faced trouble from the Legion when scheduled to perform for the Long Island, (NY) Freeport Community Concert Association in May 1959. He promptly withdrew from the event following the Board of Education's receipt of letters from the local Legion post, and 25 unnamed individuals protesting his alleged "pro-Communist sympathies." Outraged by the affair, the concert association's board

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Commission for yet another investigation of communism in Hollywood, see *New York Times*, March 27, 1960, 83; and *New York Times*, April 9, 1960, 1; and, *ALM* May 1960, 29, 31. The *New York Times* observed that Sinatra's firing of Maltz, "was the first important victory in months for those who believe the movie industry is reneging on a promise made in 1948 to refuse employment to those considered politically radical and who maintain that Communists and their supporters are re-infiltrating the industry." *New York Times*, April 9, 1960, 1. On the Legion's picketing of *Exodus*, see *New York Times*, December 22, 1960, 16. Although he denied it, observers at the time maintained that Sinatra's decision to fire Matz was, to some extent, in response to the negative effects retaining him might have on his plans to provide support to Senator John Kennedy's presidential campaign if he were nominated, see *New York Times*, April 9, 1960, 1; and, Navasky, *Naming Names*, 327. Navasky also mentions that the Catholic War Veterans participated in the Legion's campaign. *Ibid.*

publicly denounced the accusers' tactics as "not only undemocratic, but dangerous."<sup>104</sup>

To be sure, there were Legionnaires who rejected the assault on civil liberties undertaken by so many of their counterparts in this period. For example, Gordon Campbell, post commander in Monterey, (CA) denounced the California Bar Association's March 1955 proposal to disbar attorneys for invoking the Fifth Amendment as advancing "government by confession, a typical Iron Curtain country procedure," which "assumes guilt rather than innocence." In January 1953, the Oregon Legion together with the other affiliates of the Oregon Veterans Legislative Committee announced that they would not support new "negative type loyalty oaths for the state's educational system, requiring teachers to declare they were not subversive. Instead, the group endorsed "the existing affirmative loyalty oaths—similar to those taken by national and state government officials." Presented by the Legion's state commander, the committee's statement concluded, "school officials themselves should 'have the opportunity, if it is necessary, to clean their own house without being harassed by outside organizations.'" Also, as the *New York Times* reported, the Westchester County (NY) Legion censured the Scarsdale post in June 1956, after it "accused [the unit's] Un-American Activities Committee of making distorted and unwarranted charges of Communist taint against the Scarsdale District 1

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<sup>104</sup> The departure of the female lead actor, resulting from anonymous letters accusing her of being "un-American," also contributed to the closure. *New York Times*, November 20, 1953, 18; *New York Times* July 22, 1955, 10. Adler also noted that he had forthrightly denied being a Communist or party sympathizer during a trial over a Federal libel suit he and Paul Draper filed in 1950; but the suit was dismissed due to the jury's inability to reach a verdict. *New York Times*, October 29, 1953, 43; *New York Times*, May 27, 1959, 23. After the 1950 libel trial, ongoing pressures from the Hearst press, the Catholic War Veterans and the Legion resulted in Adler's loss of a promotional contract with a harmonica manufacturer and 12 performances for the Hilton Hotel Chain. He subsequently exiled himself to England for 23 years. Caute, *The Great Fear*, 532.

School Board.” In July 1958, the Minnesota Legion’s Subversives Activities Subcommittee also expressed its opposition to the tactics of McCarthyism used by such units elsewhere. As its annual report declared, “Your committee refused to be a part of unsupported attacks on individuals or organizations. We feel that such practices are unfair, undemocratic, and contrary to America’s fundamental precept of innocent until guilt has been proved under due process of law.” Further, it observed, “The American Legion, nationally, and in the State of Minnesota, has sacrificed some of its prestige and esteem by its zeal in declaring things to be un-American. All too often we have adopted the techniques of the dictators when the machinery of democracy would have better served the cause.” Such criticisms from within the Legion, however, proved to be the exception. In the 1950s, the American Veterans Committee stood out as the only national veterans’ organization that consistently challenged the Legion on civil liberties.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> *New York Times*, March 20, 1955, 63. The Oregon Veterans Legislative Committee consisted of the Legion, VFW, Disabled American Veterans, the Military Order of the Purple Heart and the Spanish American War Veterans, see *The Washington Post & Times Herald*, January 21, 1953, 13; *New York Times*, June 14, 1956, 24. For full text of the Minnesota Legion’s report see, *AVC Bulletin*, January 1958, 2; the *Chicago Defender* (Daily Edition), July 22, 1958, 4, also ran excerpts from the Minnesota report.

### Chapter 3: “We do not need vigilante tactics that violate the spirit of true Americanism:” The American Veterans Committee and the Fight for Civil Liberties.

In the summer of 1951, with the war raging in Korea, President Truman proposed revisions to the Defense Production Act of 1950 that would grant his administration direct and far-reaching authority to control wages, prices and production, “in short, ...a wartime command economy.” The bill provoked widespread opposition from Congressional conservatives and numerous economic interest groups, including the National Association of Manufacturers, resistant to increased federal authority over private enterprise. In a radio address to the nation, Truman attempted to rally public support for his bill. The President asked all Americans to put the good of the nation and the soldiers fighting in Korea before personal economic interests, declaring that his proposals would prevent a disastrous inflation harmful to the war effort.<sup>106</sup>

In mid-July 1951, the American Veterans Committee, representing the interests of liberal veterans, urged Congress to provide its full bi-partisan support for the administration’s proposals. The AVC’s public statements reinforced Truman’s call for patriotic sacrifice, and charged that ongoing Congressional opposition to the measures undermined the war effort, betrayed the troops in Korea and aided the Communists. The *AVC Bulletin* characterized Congressional opposition to the bill as “a headlong appeasement of special pressure groups at the expense of national preparedness and consumers.” The AVC’s National Administrative Committee

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<sup>106</sup> Alonzo Hamby, *Man of the People: A Life of Harry S. Truman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 579-580.

(NAC) sent a petition to Vice-President Alben Barkley and Speaker Sam Rayburn that accused Congress of undermining the stability of the home front for which the soldiers sacrificed in battle. “While Congress fiddles, the housewife’s budget burns—and by housewives we mean especially the wives and mothers of Americans now fighting in Korea. When the servicemen return, they will find higher rents, food costs multiplied and they and their families caught in a flood of inflation unleashed by a Congress that could listen only to the voices of selfish interests.” AVC national chairman Michael Straight also charged that Congressional opposition to the bill aided the Communists. “Truce talks in Korea do not signal the end of communist aggression. If inflation envelops America, Stalin will have won a victory far more decisive than any military decision in Korea. The 82<sup>nd</sup> Congress will be the most effective fifth column Stalin ever had—unless they come to their senses.”<sup>107</sup>

As this example reveals, the meanings of Cold War discourse, like any political language, were never static or fixed, but instead fluid, and therefore always open for reinterpretation. Like their conservative counterparts, liberals readily adapted anti-Communist rhetoric to advance their own particular political objectives. For liberals, no less than conservatives, anti-Communism had multiple purposes beyond expressing genuine anti-Communist sentiment, particularly as a political weapon to discredit opponents.<sup>108</sup> In the AVC’s liberal Cold War lexicon, the expansion of state authority to restrain and regulate free enterprise became true Americanism. By foregrounding images of sacrificing soldiers, families in economic

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<sup>107</sup> *AVC Bulletin*, July 1951, 4.

<sup>108</sup> For discussion of the Pennsylvania Democratic Party’s use of anti-Communist rhetoric in its fight to retain its constituents within the postwar New Deal coalition, see Philip Jenkins, *Cold War at Home, The Red Scare in Pennsylvania, 1945-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999) Chapter 3, esp. 62-68

disarray, and grieving war widows, the AVC attempted to portray conservative anti-regulatory policies as unpatriotic and un-American. These representations simultaneously depicted the New Deal/Fair Deal state as the legitimate protector of domestic stability and the national welfare.

The AVC extended this rhetorical strategy to its advocacy of civil liberties. Inasmuch as the efforts of conservatives to define and control subversion aimed to discredit liberal reform, the AVC attempted to counter their initiatives by depicting them as strengthening the Communists at the expense of democracy and national security. Therefore, when the AVC charged conservatives with resorting to anti-subversive methods akin to those of Communist police states, it was not simply voicing its concern over restrictions on civil liberties; rather, as this chapter argues, it was primarily attempting to advance New Deal liberalism. In the 1950s, the AVC defined its Americanism program as “opposition to all efforts to curtail basic American freedoms,”<sup>109</sup> and in challenging the conservative reaction to the New Deal, it came to the defense of a broad range of ordinary and prominent Americans, including educators, filmmakers, and also liberal organizations, such as the ACLU. But, as this chapter reveals, the AVC’s attempts to capture the meaning of Cold War Americanism for liberal reform did not succeed. The AVC’s failure, to some extent at least, can be attributed to its lack of resources. Despite its early success in recruiting members, the AVC became a casualty of early Cold War politics, and subsequently, it

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<sup>109</sup> In May 1952, the AVC initiated an internal reorganization to address financial deficits caused by major membership losses in the late 1940s for reasons discussed below. At that point it re-emphasized its commitment to continue its Americanism program focused on the two pillars of civil liberties and black civil rights. See Memorandum, L.C. Pakiser, AVC National Executive Director to All Chapter Chairmen, May 15, 1952, MS2144, American Veterans Committee Records, Series 7, Correspondence, 1946-2002, Subseries 2, Cooke, Paul—Correspondence, 1950-2002, box 155, Folder 5:1955-1959, Special Collections Research Center, Gelman Library, George Washington University, Washington, DC (hereinafter: MS2144, AVC Records, Ser. 7, Correspondence, Subser. 2, GL).

never developed the large membership and lobbying clout of the American Legion. Most significantly, however, the overwhelmingly conservative political culture of the 1950s ensured the political hegemony of the Legion and its allies.

Indeed, the example of the Defense Production Act of 1951 is emblematic of the AVC's political ineffectiveness in the 1950s. Congressional conservatives labeled the economic controls liberals demanded as "socialistic," and eliminated them from the final bill the President Truman "reluctantly" signed, in late July 1951.<sup>110</sup> This outcome exposes the limits of Cold War discourse as a language of reform in these years. Nevertheless, the AVC's presence serves to further disrupt and complicate the notion of a single, unitary conservative Americanism in this period.<sup>111</sup>

In part, the AVC's anti-Communist rhetoric reflected its embrace of the post-WWII new liberalism that rejected the Popular Front liberal-left alliance with the Communists.<sup>112</sup> Founded in July 1944 by younger, liberal-minded WWII veterans, the AVC saw itself "as an alternative to the more conservative Legion and VFW."<sup>113</sup> In keeping with the new liberalism, the AVC opposed the Communists and Fascists equally as undemocratic "totalitarians."<sup>114</sup> The AVC's anti-Communist stance became increasingly apparent after the Communist Party (CP) targeted the AVC for

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<sup>110</sup> *Washington Post & Times Herald*, August 1, 1951, 1.

<sup>111</sup> For an argument that a variety of Americanisms competed against a dominant conservative, corporate Americanism in the late 1940s, see for example, Stuart J. Little, "The Freedom Train: Citizenship and Postwar Political Culture, 1946-1949," *American Studies* 34 (Spring, 1993): esp. 38-39.

<sup>112</sup> On the new liberalism, generally, Mary Sperling McAuliffe, *Crisis on the Left: Cold War Politics and American Liberals, 1947-1954* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1978), Chapters, 5-7.

<sup>113</sup> This quote is from Robert F. Saxe, *Settling Down: World War Two Veterans' Challenge to the Postwar Consensus* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 117-118; also see, Robert L. Tyler, "The American Veterans Committee: Out of a Hot War and Into the Cold," *American Quarterly* 18 (Autumn 1966): 419-420.

<sup>114</sup> In early 1948, for example, then AVC national Chairman Chat Patterson (1947-1948), announced his full support of the anti-Communist California Chapters' efforts to oust the "red tinged varieties of totalitarianism," from the state organization. Patterson was then a leader of the anti-Communist faction (Independent Progressives) that elected him national Chairman and the entire NPC governing body at the 2<sup>nd</sup> national convention in June 1947. *Ibid.*, 429.

infiltration in early 1946, causing a two-year long internal factional struggle for control of the organization. At AVC's first national convention in June 1946, the CP-led Left faction lost its bid to open membership to Spanish Civil War veterans and to gain proportional representation on the National Planning Committee (the governing executive committee), but it still won six (of sixteen total) seats on that body. After the convention, the AVC's liberal majority increasingly asserted its desire to purge the Communists. In November 1946, the NPC passed a resolution opposing the efforts of members of the Communist Party to gain "entrance into our ranks" and "to use AVC as a sounding board for their perverse philosophy." At the second national convention, in June 1947, liberal anti-Communist candidates won both the national chairmanship and all NPC seats.<sup>115</sup>

Factional turmoil continued through 1948, especially as debate concerning the Progressive Party presidential campaign of Henry Wallace escalated; but the AVC took decisive steps that defeated the Communists by the end of the year. After a highly publicized trial in the summer, the National Administrative Committee (NAC) expelled Communist *Daily Worker* editor John Gates from the AVC in September, charging that his use of his membership to advance the Communist Party violated the constitutional rule on partisan political activity. In November, the AVC national office revoked the charter of the New York Area Council "a stronghold of the Left." That same month, the third national convention passed a resolution that condemned the "totalitarian principles and destructive practices of the American Communist Party," and ruled Communists "ineligible for membership in the AVC." The

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<sup>115</sup>Ibid., 423, 424, 426, 429.

resolution also directed the national office “to clean out and keep out members of the Communist Party from our ranks.”<sup>116</sup> In February 1950 the *AVC Bulletin* announced, “The last refuge of the [Communist faction] ‘east wing,’ the Los Angeles Area Council, has surrendered without a fight.” As the *Bulletin* explained, “five of the major east wing chapters...have disbanded...finally recognizing they have no chance of controlling AVC now or in the distant future” they “are being recruited into an extreme left-wing organization of their own, reputedly called the Progressive Veterans of America.”<sup>117</sup>

While the AVC’s internal policies helped to nurture the new anti-Communist liberalism also emerging among other liberal organizations in the postwar years,<sup>118</sup> it had particularly close ties with the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA). Founded in early 1947 by as an exclusively non-Communist liberal organization mainly to perpetuate the New Deal, the ADA regarded American Communists as instruments of Soviet dictatorship, and from its inception it officially barred them from membership<sup>119</sup> The fact that many of its key leaders and members also participated actively in the ADA further solidified AVC’s role in building the new liberalism. Among ADA’s founding members were: Charles Bolt and Gilbert Harrison, respectively AVC national chairman in 1946-1947 and 1948-1949, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr., AVC national housing director in 1947, and AVC’er and civil liberties attorney Joe Rauh, Jr.<sup>120</sup> Michael Straight, AVC national chairman from

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<sup>116</sup>Ibid., 429-430, 431-433.

<sup>117</sup>*AVC Bulletin*, February, 1950, 3.

<sup>118</sup> Tyler, “The American Veterans Committee: Out of a Hot War and Into the Cold,” 427.

<sup>119</sup> McAuliffe, *Crisis on the Left*, 6-7.

<sup>120</sup> *New York Times*, January 5, 1947, 5; for Bolte’s tenure as AVC national Chairman, Tyler, “The American Veterans Committee: Out of a Hot War and Into the Cold,” 424, 429; for the AVC backgrounds of FDR, Jr., Harrison and Rauh, see (FDR, Jr.) *New York Times*, January 13, 1947, 6;

1949-1952 (also publisher of the *New Republic*, 1946-1956), joined the ADA's New York State Board in August 1948. Also, Mickey Levine, who helped found the AVC (and national chairman from 1955-1960), also chaired the ADA's Manhattan West Side branch in the late 1940s.<sup>121</sup>

But other factors, besides its ideological affinities with the new liberalism, more fundamentally animated the AVC's anti-Communist rhetoric in the 1950s. Its reputation as liberal-left organization opened the AVC to accusations of being a communist front. Conservative veterans' organizations publicly red-baited the AVC through the late 1940s.<sup>122</sup> On one level then, Cold War discourse provided the AVC with a political weapon to counter these attacks. In April 1949, for example, when local units of the Legion, VFW and Catholic War Veterans (CWV) in Queens (NY) learned that the Jewish War Veterans had invited the AVC to participate in Memorial Day ceremonies with all veterans' organizations, they publicly attacked the AVC for its "communistic tendencies" and boycotted the events. In response, local AVC leader Charles Belous pointed to AVC's anti-Communist record. "Certainly, since our last national convention," he declared, "there should be no doubt about the anti-

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(Harrison's obituary) *New York Times*, January 8, 2008, C14; and, *New York Times*, November 29, 1948, 8. Harrison also became owner and publisher of *New Republic* sometime in the mid-1950s through 1974, *Ibid.*; (Rauh) *AVC Bulletin*, July-August 1959, 3. For Rauh's civil liberties career, see (obituary) *New York Times*, September 5, 1992, 10. Rauh was also ADA national Chairman, in 1955, *Washington Post & Times Herald* April 11, 1955, 2.

<sup>121</sup>Straight) *New York Times*, November 28, 1949, 17; *Washington Post & Times Herald*, June 29, 1952, M16; and, (obituary) *New York Times*, January 5, 2004, B8; (Levine) *New York Times*, February 3, 1949, 16; and, (obituary) *New York Times*, December 1, 1996, 58. Levine resigned from ADA in 1975, *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup>Speaking before the New York state convention of Catholic War Veterans in May 1946, the Legion's former New York County Commander declared that the AVC was "under Communist influences." *New York Times*, May 11, 1946, 7. Also, in July 1946, the VFW national commander attacked the AVC as "the worst example of certain veterans' groups which are ridden with Communist Front leaders and fellow travelers." Besides these groups, the Disabled Veterans of America and conservative columnist Westbrook Pegler, also red-baited the AVC in early 1946, Saxe, *Settling Down*, 139, 137.

Communist position of our organization.” Furthermore, he proclaimed, “to label the AVC as communistic was ‘nothing short of cheap politics that plays right into the hands of the Communist element these veterans’ groups are supposed to be fighting.’”<sup>123</sup>

Dramatic membership losses following the purge of the Communists, combined with the increasingly conservative Cold War atmosphere in the early 1950s, also heightened the AVC’s need to publicly exhibit its anti-Communist credentials. Nation-wide membership plunged from a peak of nearly 100,000 in 1947<sup>124</sup> to around 35,000 by May 1950.<sup>125</sup> For the remainder of the 1950s, it hovered around 30,000.<sup>126</sup> The loss of the Communists and their political allies obviously accounted for some portion of this decline. But as the Cold War climate intensified, many non-Communist liberal AVC’ers undoubtedly followed former Democratic Congressman and AVC founder Will Rogers, Jr., who left the California AVC in 1948. In his widely publicized letter of resignation, Rogers declared the unit was “nothing but a Communist front.” He also urged other branch members “to resign and get out.” “We lost a battle here in California... To remain in the State organization is to give assistance to America’s enemies,” he warned.<sup>127</sup> Members who feared being labeled a Communist sympathizer (as perhaps Rogers did) had good reason to leave the AVC.

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<sup>123</sup> *New York Times*, April 15, 1949, 4.

<sup>124</sup> Saxe, *Settling Down*, 145, and fn 64, 207.

<sup>125</sup> *Los Angeles Times*, May 2, 1950, B6.

<sup>126</sup> The AVC claimed 30,000 members in November 1955, and 25,000 in 1960, see *New York Times*, November 13, 1955, 51, and *Ibid.*, June 13, 1960, 13. The AVC remained fourth in size, behind the Legion, VFW and Amvets, see *Washington Post & Times Herald*, August 28, 1952, 5. In 1954, Amvets, the only other major WWII veterans’ organization, claimed a membership of nearly 125,000. See Rodney G. Minot, *Peerless Patriots: Organized Veterans and the Spirit of Americanism* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1962), 109.

<sup>127</sup> *Washington Post & Times Herald*, May 25, 1948, 15.

Indeed, the Cold War shattered the AVC's initial plans of becoming a mass movement. Throughout the 1950s, therefore, the AVC primarily remained an organization of well-educated, solidly middle class, and overwhelmingly white liberal veterans. A 1954 Columbia University survey of 70 percent of all AVC members reported that over half earned annual incomes "of \$7,000 and higher," well above 1955 average U.S. per capita income of \$2,000. Furthermore, some "76 percent who filled out questionnaires," completed "four years of college or more." Also, the survey reported, while *Reader's Digest*, *Life*, *McCall's* and *Ladies Home Journal* garnered the country's largest readership, AVC members identified *The New Yorker*, *Time*, *Life* and *New Republic* as their "favorite" magazines. Respondents also gave FDR and Adlai Stevenson their highest approval, while 79 percent disapproved of Eisenhower's presidential record.<sup>128</sup> As the socio-economic status of most members suggests, virtually all AVC chapters active in the 1950s were located in large cities.<sup>129</sup> But despite the organization's strong commitment to black civil rights (examined in

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<sup>128</sup> For an internal discussion of AVC's aims of becoming a mass movement, that emerged sometime in late 1945 to early 1946, see "An Open Letter to AVC," Lincoln Lauterstein to Michael Straight, May 9, 1951. MS2144, AVC Records, Ser. 7, Correspondence, Subser.1, GL. The results of the survey, conducted by the Teachers Center College Center, Columbia University, are reported in *AVC Bulletin*, June 1954, 3; for per capita income in 1955 (in constant 1958 dollars), see Michael Barone, *Our Country: The Shaping of America From Roosevelt to Reagan* (New York: Free Press), 391. Biographies of AVC staff and elected officials reported in the *AVC Bulletin* reveal a high preponderance of attorneys and other white-collared professionals among them. Two Maryland AVC'ers elected to the NPC in 1954 make this point. Lou Pakiser, (formerly AVC's first National Executive Director), then Montgomery County Chapter Treasurer, was also a geo-physicist with the U.S. Geological Survey. Frank Iglehart, then Chairman of the Greater Baltimore Chapter, was an attorney in a Baltimore law firm. *AVC Bulletin*, September 1954, 2.

<sup>129</sup> See, *Guide to the American Veterans Committee Records, 1942-2002*, MS 2144, Special Collections Research Center, GL. While the guide of individual chapters active in the 1950s is not complete (for instance, it does not include locales such as Atlanta, GA, Baltimore, MD and Trenton, NJ discussed in this study), it does indicate that the AVC was overwhelmingly urban: Northeast: Boston, (Harvard); New York: Bronx, Brooklyn, Laurelton-Rosedale [Queens], Manhattan, Riverside; Washington DC; Midwest: Chicago, Cleveland, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, St. Louis, St. Paul; West Coast: CA: Los Angeles, San Francisco; South: Jackson, MS.

the next chapter), delegates to the 1957 AVC national convention, as the *Afro-American* reported, “were nearly ninety percent white.”<sup>130</sup>

Yet aside from its need to use Cold War language to defend itself from conservative red-baiting, the AVC primarily adopted anti-Communist rhetoric to promote its core postwar political objective—the advancement of the New Deal order. This had been on the agenda of the organization since its inception. The preamble to its constitution, adopted at the first national convention in 1946, asserted that one of its main purposes was: “to maintain full production and full employment in our country under a system of free enterprise in which business, labor, agriculture and government cooperate.”<sup>131</sup> The AVC attracted a number of individuals into its staff and leadership ranks who worked in important positions to advance the New Deal both before and after 1945. After completing his undergraduate studies at Cambridge University with John Maynard Keynes in 1937, Michael Straight joined the New Deal as a State Department economist and wrote speeches for President and Mrs. Roosevelt.<sup>132</sup> His efforts to defend the New Deal against its detractors began as early as WWII. When *New Republic* (owned by his family) sponsored a dinner in early 1942 “to celebrate...the tenth year of the Roosevelt administration and arouse in the New Deal a spirit for fighting back at its critics,” Straight, then the magazine’s

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<sup>130</sup> *The Afro-American*, May 11, 1957, 12.

<sup>131</sup> This language appears in the fourth clause of the constitution’s preamble, Tyler, “The American Veterans Committee: Out of a Hot War and Into the Cold,” 424.

<sup>132</sup> On Straight’s background, see (obituary) *New York Times*, January 5, 2004, B8. Straight’s father Willard D. Straight was a wealthy investment banker with J. Morgan & Co., who, together with his wife Dorothy Payne Whitney Straight, founded *New Republic* magazine in 1914. Michael joined the Communist Party while at Cambridge, and passed economic reports to Soviet agents while a New Deal official, and left the CP sometime in 1940-41 over the Hitler-Stalin accord. On advice of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., he voluntarily disclosed his CP past to the FBI in 1963 before taking an appointed position in the National Endowment for the Arts that year.

Washington correspondent, served as toastmaster.<sup>133</sup> Following his discharge from the Army, Hubert Will attended University of Chicago Law School, and subsequently served as “a special secretary to New York Senator Robert Wagner.” He was elected to the NPC in 1954.<sup>134</sup> Numerous other AVC’ers held less prestigious, but nonetheless important positions. For instance, Dave Garwin, named director of organization for the Washington DC chapter in early 1951, previously “served for sometime” as a Committee for the Nation’s Health field representative “organizing support for President Truman’s national health program.”<sup>135</sup>

Indeed, as conservatives accelerated their postwar roll back of liberalism, the AVC endeavored to defend and expand the New Deal/Fair Deal agenda. In September 1947, the AVC publicly denounced the national American Legion convention for its “refusal to endorse the [Taft-Ellender-Wagner] housing bill.” Delegates to the 1948 AVC national convention pledged themselves to work for “complete repeal of the Taft-Hartley Act” and “an extended social security program.”<sup>136</sup> Throughout the 1950s the AVC also lent its support to the labor movement. In February 1951, it publicly supported the efforts of railroad workers to regain their collective bargaining rights following President Truman’s seizure of the industry that suspended their strike the previous year. The AVC also assisted federal employee unions by lobbying Congress on their behalf, and it worked cooperatively with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). The AVC also maintained ties with the AFL-CIO. In 1959, the *Bulletin* reported that Julie Bernstein, a

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<sup>133</sup>*New York Times*, March 7, 1942, 15.

<sup>134</sup>*AVC Bulletin*, October 1954, 2.

<sup>135</sup>*AVC Bulletin*, January 1951, 4.

<sup>136</sup>*New York Times*, September 3, 1947, 17; *New York Times*, November 30, 1948, 22.

Massachusetts AFL-CIO official, also served on AVC's National Board.<sup>137</sup>

One of the AVC's earliest efforts to defend liberalism in the 1950s was its public campaign against the man who most outwardly personified the anti-New Deal backlash—Senator Joseph R. McCarthy.<sup>138</sup> An *AVC Bulletin* editorial in March 1950, for instance, employing Cold War Americanism, responded to the Senator's "false" charges of Communist infiltration of the State Department by stating that they undermined America's strength in the world. "If these charges were true, neither Americans nor their allies could have confidence in our government and all that it is trying to do." McCarthy's accusations, declared the AVC, also served to "weaken America" by potentially causing much needed national security staff to quit their jobs "at a time when ability in government is vital to democracy and peace." The AVC's attacks clearly rattled McCarthy. On March 14, 1950, two days before the AVC's national chairman Michael Straight was to address the group's Harvard University chapter on the Senator's accusations of Communist subversion in the State Department, McCarthy charged that *New Republic*, then under Straight's editorship, was "pro-Communist."<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>137</sup>The AVC publicly denounced anti-union forces for using patriotism "to turn our soldiers and our veterans against American labor by charges that the Railroad Brotherhoods are responsible for preventing supplies from reaching our armed forces." *AVC Bulletin*, February 1951, 8; also, for example, AVC lobbied the Senate to aid postal workers unions in early 1951, see *AVC Bulletin*, April 1951, 3. While the nature of AVC's work with the CIO needs fuller study, in June 1950, CIO President Philip Murray urged his local unions to help advance the AVC given its "support not only 'morally, but physically and mentally,'" to the CIO. *AVC Bulletin*, June 1950, 1. Also, in November 1951, the AVC sent "brotherly greetings" to the CIO's 10<sup>th</sup> national convention, noting "in the very tense days ahead we are looking forward to continued and effective joint action." *Ibid.*, November 1951, 1; Bernstein was also New England Regional Director of the Jewish Labor Committee, *AVC Bulletin*, October 1959, 3.

<sup>138</sup>The best account linking McCarthy's rise to the postwar conservative reaction to the New Deal remains, Robert Griffith, *The Politics of Fear: Joseph R. McCarthy and the Senate* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press), esp. Chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>139</sup> See the editorial "McCarthy" in *AVC Bulletin*, March 1950, 2; "Straight to Speak on McCarthy 'Disclosures,'" MS 2144, American Veterans Committee Records, Series 3, Official Statements, 1946-

Undeterred by McCarthy's allegation, the AVC continued its offensive. In mid-April 1950, Andrew Rice, AVC's Washington DC chapter chairman, publicly excoriated the Senator for the harm his methods inflicted on the nation. In Rice's formulation, McCarthy was a traitor out to undermine American freedoms. "[B]y the venom of his denunciations he has given aid and comfort to the enemies of democracy who seek to sow seeds of hate and distrust...by the violence of his accusations he has...put a heavy strain on the fabric of our democratic pattern of free discussion. This nation can ill afford any Joe McCarthy's." In early June 1950, the AVC's National Planning Committee (NPC) publicly called for McCarthy's impeachment "for high crimes and misdemeanors." Its "articles of impeachment" reinforced the notion that his actions were simultaneously eroding the nation's democratic institutions and their ability to meet the demands of the Cold War. As the NPC charged, McCarthy "has traduced, subverted, and degraded the Senate...thereby impairing, if not destroying...[its] effectiveness in the critical arena of world affairs....He has done more than any other un-American force to bring world scorn, domestic obloquy, and general disgrace upon the Senate." In using Hitler's "'Big Lie' technique" along with "his own invention of the 'Multiple Untruth,'" the NPC maintained, McCarthy was "introducing into the America way of life the seeds of our own destruction and the road to totalitarianism." The group gave further support to its contention that McCarthy's methods undermined the country's strategic position in the world, in late September 1951, when it opposed his efforts to derail Philip Jessup's nomination as a United Nations delegate. In opposing McCarthy's charge

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2001, Press Releases, box 79, folder 5: 1950-1954, Special Collections Research Center, Gelman Library, George Washington University, Washington, DC (hereinafter: MS 2144, AVC Records, Ser. 3, Press Releases, GL.

that Jessup “had an affinity for Communist causes,” based on his alleged Communist front memberships, the AVC stated that Jessup’s role at the U.N. was “vital,” since he had “proved his capacity to meet and master Soviet spokesmen.” Furthermore, the AVC’s national board of directors declared, “Mr. Jessup’s record stands unstained despite the insinuations, false accusations and distortions of McCarthy...In seeking to destroy our leaders in the cold war McCarthy serves Stalin—not the American people.”<sup>140</sup>

The AVC’s vigorous campaign against McCarthy contrasted sharply with the temerity displayed by most liberals who abhorred his methods, but failed to offer any sustained opposition to stop to him. For the AVC, providing its support to the handful of Congressional leaders who opposed McCarthy, and the individuals he targeted, became occasions for mobilizing public opposition to the damage being done to civil liberties. For example, in late December 1950, McCarthy attempted to silence columnist Drew Pearson, one of his chief outspoken critics, by claiming that Pearson’s sponsor, the Adam Hat Stores, Inc., “is unknowingly contributing at least something to the cause of international communism by keeping this Communist spokesman on the air.” After the company dropped its sponsorship of Pearson, the AVC termed the incident, as the *Washington Post* noted, “a threat to American freedom of expression,” and reissued its call to the newly seated Congress to impeach

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<sup>140</sup>See Rice’s letter to the editor, “McCarthy’s Damage,” *New York Times*, April 17, 1950, 8. The NPC’s impeachment vote was unanimous among the 22 (of 25) members attending its meeting June 2-3, see *AVC Bulletin*, June 1950, 1, 4. *AVC Bulletin*, July 1950, 4. The July *Bulletin* (Ibid.) also reported on the strong parallels between the language used in the Tyding’s Subcommittee’s July report concerning McCarthy’s State Department Charges and in NPC’s impeachment articles issued in June. For AVC’s quotes on the Jessup nomination, see “Resolution on Philip Jessup,” attachment in, AVC press release, September 24, 1951, MS 2144, AVC Records, Ser. 3, Press Releases, box 79, folder 5: 1950-1954, GL; the Jessup case is also covered in *AVC Bulletin*, October 1951, 5 and *Ibid.*, November, 1951, 1. McCarthy is quoted in, David M. Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 211.

McCarthy. Similarly, in May 1953, the group labeled McCarthy's investigation of the anti-McCarthy *New York Post* and its editor James Wechsler for alleged Communist links, as "really an attack on the freedom of the press," directed against a newspaper that "has been in the forefront of the fight against the communist threat." As the AVC implied, by lodging false charges against his critics in the press, such as Wechsler, McCarthy simultaneously undermined the First Amendment and their efforts to combat subversion. While Democratic Senator William Benton's liberal Senate colleagues failed to back his persistent opposition to McCarthy, the AVC steadfastly supported him. For example, in March 1952, when Benton relinquished his immunity and openly challenged McCarthy to refute the charges he issued for his expulsion, including making false accusations and other violations, the AVC rallied to his support, and declared, "we are encouraged that Senator Benton has stood up bravely against the most dangerous man in the United States, a man who endangers the very foundation of American liberty—the Bill of Rights."<sup>141</sup>

The AVC's campaign against McCarthy persisted up through the Senator's eventual demise in the wake of the army-McCarthy hearings. In late January 1953,

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<sup>141</sup>*Washington Post & Times Herald*, December 25, 1950, B2. Also, in early 1951, AVC urged the Democratic leadership, namely Speaker Sam Rayburn, Majority Leader John W. McCormick, and House Judiciary Committee Chairman Emanuel Celler "to institute impeachment proceedings against Senator McCarthy." See Memorandum, Pakiser to Miriam [secretary], January 22, 1951, and see, L.C. Pakiser to Hon. Emanuel Celler, January 31, 1951, in MS 2144, AVC Records, Series 1, Subjects, 1946-2000, Subseries 1, General, box 10, folder 4: McCarthy, Senator Joseph—Impeachment, 1953-1954, (hereinafter: Ser.1, Subjects, Subser. 1). The AVC maintained its support of Pearson's forceful criticisms of McCarthy, and also of HUAC, see for example, *AVC Bulletin*, February 1951, 8. On *The New York Post* and Wechsler, see *AVC Bulletin*, May 1953, 1. The AVC's New York Region presented Wechsler and the *Post* with its Public Service Award for its "series of articles on McCarthy, see *AVC Bulletin*, November 1951, 3. For the support given to Benton, see AVC press release, March 18, 1952, MS 2144, AVC Records, Ser. 3, Press Releases, box 79, folder 5: 1950-1954, GL. For discussion of the failure of Senate liberals to support Benton's efforts against McCarthy, with the exception of Senator Herbert Lehman (D-New York), see McAuliffe, *Crisis on the Left*, 80-82. As McAuliffe notes, liberals in Congress would not effectively act against McCarthy until his Senate censure in late 1954, which, even then, "involved no direct action against McCarthy and dealt with limited charges." *Ibid.*, 131-132, for this quote, 144.

the group called for President Eisenhower to order a Justice Department investigation of McCarthy's finances, after a Senate subcommittee report revealed that his periodic bank deposits far exceeded what his Senatorial pay alone could sustain. Building on themes developed earlier, the AVC's representations of McCarthy focused on his role in subverting the nation by corroding the foundations of civil liberties and smearing the reputations of its key leaders and institutions in the Cold War. In April, 1954 the *Bulletin* reported on an address by New Jersey Governor Robert Meyner at its recent NPC meeting, where he denounced McCarthy "as 'a modern 'Robespierre'" for having "set out to create a reign of terror in America." As Meyner noted, "The terror corrupts political life...it extends to all parts of the nation, stifling the natural genius of freedom and democracy." Failure to stop it meant "we are inviting an American Gestapo...the techniques of the totalitarians, whose philosophies we despise and whose methods we deplore."<sup>142</sup>

The AVC followed a similar strategy in dealing with McCarthy's attack on Brigadier General Ralph W. Zwicker, in late February 1954, when he appeared before the Senator's Investigations Subcommittee examining the Army's non-punitive discharge of suspected subversive Irving Peress, who McCarthy wanted court-martialed after he invoked the Fifth Amendment in previous testimony before the same committee. After Zwicker refused McCarthy's request for the names of those responsible for the action, he lashed out at the general, declaring he was "not fit to

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<sup>142</sup> *Washington Post & Times Herald*, January 27, 1953, 3; *AVC Bulletin*, April 1954, 1; AVC member Congressman Sidney Yates introduced Meyner "as a standard bearer of the finest ideals of American democracy." For his part, Meyner "praised AVC for its leading role in arousing the American people to the dangers of McCarthyism." *Ibid.*, April 1954, 1. For an excellent account of the army-McCarthy hearings and McCarthy's subsequent demise, see Robert Griffith, *The Politics of Fear: Joseph R. McCarthy and the Senate* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), Chapters, 8-9.

wear that uniform” and that he “lacked the brains of a five year old.” The *AVC Bulletin* immediately denounced McCarthy’s attack for “sabotaging the morale of America’s armed forces.” A cartoon by the group’s national chairman Bill Mauldin accompanying the story, featured a machine gun wielding WWII German soldier standing guard over a long line of O.W.’s consisting of the Army’s top officers led by Eisenhower, all of whom, including the president, marched by with their hands clasped behind their heads. The German soldier image, as the story revealed, linked Zwicker’s presence at the Battle of the Bulge to McCarthy’s 1948 role in defending the Nazi officers responsible for the mass killing of American O.W.’s at Baugnez Crossroads, Belgium, subsequently termed the Malmedy Massacre.<sup>143</sup> In a telegram to President Eisenhower, the AVC asked, “Is it coincidental that his latest Army target [is] Brig. Gen. Ralph W. Zwicker...[of] the U.S. 2<sup>nd</sup> Division which fought brilliantly...against units of the same S.S. troops responsible for the cold blooded murder of American prisoners?” Just as he had undermined the Army in the Malmedy investigation, by charging the high command with gross incompetence, if not subversion, for failing to court martial Peress, who’s only offense was use of his Fifth Amendment privilege; McCarthy was once again aiding the enemy’s cause. In late July 1954, the AVC again reinforced the image of McCarthy as a saboteur undermining U.S. interests when it sought Senate leadership support for the Flanders

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<sup>143</sup> The Malmedy Massacre refers to the mass execution of unarmed captured U.S. soldiers by elite unit of the First S.S. Panzer Division outside Malmedy, Belgium during the Battle of the Bulge in 1944. An investigation by the Office of the Judge Advocate later urged authorities to overturn death sentences issued by a U.S. war-crime court for many of the S.S. troops participating in the massacre after finding their confessions had been obtained through beatings. As controversy erupted over the issue of the death sentences, McCarthy volunteered to participate in the bi-partisan Senate Subcommittee proceedings established to investigate the matter, and came to the defense of those sentenced to hang. Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense*, 74-75.

resolution, calling for McCarthy's censure, by drawing attention to "the terrible damage inflicted both at home and abroad by the junior Senator from Wisconsin."<sup>144</sup>

The AVC received a barrage of protest letters denouncing its calls for McCarthy's impeachment. Using the discourse of Cold War conservative Americanism, these writers attempted to counter AVC's impeachment case against McCarthy, by depicting both the group and its anti-McCarthy campaign as unpatriotic and subversive. One writer, identifying himself as "a good American" told AVC in June 1950, "More power to the American from Wisconsin...No Pink organization can frighten him." Others pointed to what they regarded as McCarthy's patriotic WWII military service and AVC's wrongheaded support of McCarthy's targets. For example, in February 1951, Thomas Marro of New York City wrote, "Your defense of 'Trojan Horse' Pearson and attack on our ex-Marine, Senator Joe McCarthy proves you are mis-named. More fitting is Un-American Veterans Committee." Likewise

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<sup>144</sup> On the Peress-Zwicker incident, including McCarthy's words to Zwicker quoted here, see Griffith, *The Politics of Fear*, 246-247. Peress's discharge initially stemmed from his refusal to answer an earlier inquiry into his politics, *Ibid.*; *AVC Bulletin*, March 1954, 1. The AVC's early campaign to impeach McCarthy included using the endorsements of AVC member and Malmedy survivor Virgil Lary, Jr., see *AVC Bulletin*, February 1951, 1; and, AVC press release, n.d. in MS 2114, AVC Records, Ser. 3, Press Releases, box 79, folder 5: 1950-1954, GL. The *Bulletin* told readers of Lary's belief that "in defending the Nazi murderers [McCarthy] had given the communist aggressors in Korea confidence that they would escape punishment for their deeds." As it quoted Lary, "I do not believe that the wives and mothers of American soldiers in Korea want to leave communists murderers to the all too tender mercies of Senator McCarthy." See, *AVC Bulletin*, February 1951, 1. For an attempt, in the absence of clear evidence, to explain McCarthy's defense of the German S.S. soldiers responsible for the Malmedy atrocities see, Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense*, 74-80. The July 1954 communication seeking Senate support for the censure was sent to Republican Majority Leader Sen. Knowland and Minority Leader Sen. Johnson. See Bill Mauldin, National Chairman, AVC to Hon. William F. Knowland, July 26, 1954; and, Mauldin to Hon. Lyndon B. Johnson, July 26, 1954, in MS2144, AVC Records, Ser.1, Subjects, Subser. 1, box 10, folder 4: McCarthy—Impeachment, 1953-1954. Significantly, the AVC also functioned as one of the organization's composing the liberal-labor coalition, or Clearing House, organized by the National Committee for an Effective Congress (NCEC) to build broad Senate support for the Flanders resolution. One of the central figures directing the Clearing House's operations in 1953 was later AVC executive director Kenneth Birkhead, then the Senate Democratic Campaign Committee's staff director. See Griffith, *The Politics of Fear*, see fn 35, 282, 228.

disgruntled over the AVC's defense of Pearson, Thomas Hilton of Ruston, Louisiana declared, "Joe Stalin has more than fifty thousand of his stooges within our borders...the kind of people Drew Pearson has his arm around while he goes his way preaching 'how to make democracy live.'" As Hilton concluded, "Sen. McCarthy will go down in history as making the greatest single-handed fight against Communism." Elizabeth Baker of Coatesville, Pennsylvania asked the AVC, "Did you protest about Hiss too?...Cannot understand why you Veterans are on wrong side against USA." Similarly, a New York City Gold Star Mother wrote, "I am surprised at a Veterans' organization taking such Un-American steps. McCarthy so far has *not* been proved *guilty* of anything. Truman is the one to be impeached."<sup>145</sup>

Veterans backing McCarthy voiced similar protests against AVC's impeachment campaign. A member of the Legion's 40 & 8 Society told the AVC in late December 1950, "we need more men like McCarthy" and, "when the word 'Impeachment' is used there is only one place for it...for the biggest Socialist in office today in our once free country. As for your organization, you are the ones the American Legion and Vets of Foreign Wars wouldn't let in. We may run McCarthy vs. Truman." Also, New York City resident Stanley Rys wrote the group, "As a combat Infantry veteran of World War Two, I am deeply ashamed that a veterans'

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<sup>145</sup>As noted above, the AVC issued two calls of McCarthy's impeachment, in June and December 1950. Significantly, it issued the second call on December 24, the anniversary of the Malmedy Massacre. On this point, see L.C. Pakiser to Hon. Emanuel Celler, Chairman, House Judiciary Committee, January 31, 1951, MS 2144, AVC Records, Subjects, Ser. 1, Subser. 1, box 10, folder 4: McCarthy—Impeachment, 1953-1954. See (postcard), A.B. Howard, Chicago, IL to Dear Boys, AVC, June 6, 1950, Ibid., box 10, folder 5: McCarthy—Impeachment, 1950-1951; (postcard) Thomas Marro, NYC, to AVC, February 4, 1951, Ibid. Marro also referred to AVC's Communist past noting: "wet-nursed by Communist and subversives, a puny, mis-fit outfit, the AVC is a blot on the American landscape." See (postcard), Thomas A. Hilton, Ruston, LS, to AVC, December 26, 1950, Ibid. (Hilton forwarded a duplicate of the letter he sent to the *Shreveport Journal* to voice his protest to the AVC); Elizabeth N. Baker, Coatesville, PA, to AVC, June 5, 1950, Ibid.; (postcard) A Gold Star Mother, NYC, to National Commander [sic] Straight, AVC, June 8, 1950, Ibid.

organization would stoop so low and condemn a fighting Marine who is trying to weed out this fifth column in [the] U.S.A. I suggest that your organization follow this modern Billy Mitchell and assist him in every manner possible.” In June 1950, an anonymous American Legion member emphatically declared, “being a veteran do not include me in the AVC for I have more respect for the honorable Senator than to disrespect him even for the best man in the USA when he is fighting Communists.” In an extended anti-Semitic rant against “the damned Jew traitors of our country,” a former World War II Chaplain, Rev. Philip Separovic of Milwaukee, Wisconsin told the AVC in December, 1950, “Instead of helping Senator McCarthy to combat these damned traitors you attack him...That is what you call Americanism...nothing but helping...the traitors, who are selling for the Judas’s pennies our country.”<sup>146</sup>

The AVC’s campaign against McCarthy also angered at least some of its own members. In early June, 1950, Peter Cutler, of Garrison, NY, who joined when discharged from the Navy in 1945, returned his membership card in protest of the group’s impeachment call, and declared, “Your organization is the one subverting Democracy & [sic] keeping the facts of Communism, Socialism & Subversion from the American people and playing right into to the hands of Joe Stalin.” As Cutler, noted, “McCarthy was 100% right in the Amerasia Case which betrayed our country and most [of] all our veterans and those who gave their lives in battle for the greatest Nation in World history!” Likewise, in late 1953, Waylan Minot, a disabled veteran and AVC “life member” defended McCarthy’s anti-communist record and questioned

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<sup>146</sup> See (postcard), A 40 & 8’er to AVC, December 27, 1950, MS 2144, AVC Records, Subjects, Ser.1, Subser.1, box 10, folder 5: McCarthy—Impeachment, 1950-1951; Stanley W. Rys, NYC, to AVC, December 26, 1950; Ibid.; Anonymous to AVC, June 5, 1950, Ibid.; and, *AVC Bulletin*, June 1950, 2; Rev. Philip F. Separovic, Chaplain WWII, to AVC December 26, 1950, MS 2144, AVC Records, Subjects, Ser.1, Subser.1, box 10, folder 5: McCarthy—Impeachment, 1950-1951.

the AVC's loyalty for having attacked him. As Minot informed the group, "When I read that the AVC proposes to 'get' McCarthy and to condemn 'McCarthyism' I boil." Thank God for McCarthy's guts and ability to stand abuse from those who should be on his side—those who have *faced* death to uphold our Constitution." Given its stance on McCarthy, he felt that at its upcoming national convention, the AVC "should make it 100% clear, without equivocation...that it is unalterably opposed to Communism."<sup>147</sup>

In short, to the AVC's critics, its defense of the civil liberties of accused Communists amounted to another form of subversion, hindering the work of the country's real Cold War patriot, Joe McCarthy. Many veterans idealized McCarthy as the "fighting Marine," carrying out the good patriotic defense of the nation against dictatorship they had undertaken in WWII, only this time against America's newest enemy—Soviet Communism. In their minds, by having "the guts" to take on this new battle against the Communists, McCarthy remained true to the sacrifices they made during the war. By attacking McCarthy, who, like Billy Mitchell before him, was engaged in a "single-handed" crusade to keep the country strong, the AVC not only failed to uphold veterans' patriotic mission to aid that effort, it actually betrayed it through its defense of men like Drew Pearson, who, by embracing the Kremlin's "stooges," simply gave America's enemies the cover they needed to carry out Stalin's work.

The AVC also defended civil liberties by opposing the array of anti-subversion legislation. While Senate liberals, acting on their anticommunist

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<sup>147</sup> Peter S. Cutler, Post Road Farm, Garrison NY to Mr. Pakiser, June 9, 1950, AVC Records, Subjects, Ser.1, Subser.1, box 10, folder 5: McCarthy—Impeachment, 1950-1951; for Minot's comments, *AVC Bulletin*, November 1953, 2.

commitments, supported the McCarran Internal Security Act, the AVC's anti-Communism did not compromise its efforts to protect civil liberties. The group lobbied against the legislation, testifying before its sponsoring committees and working in coalition with some 21 pro-civil liberties organizations among its liberal allies. In testimony before HUAC, in late March, 1950, the AVC's Michael Straight argued that existing laws were already sufficient, but if need be, they "should be strengthened," to avert "legislation that would promulgate a very dangerous principle of guilt by association." To do otherwise, Straight told HUAC, would undercut America's Cold War strategy: "We think the critical front is in Berlin, Southeast Asia, India and Rome. We think it is an illusion to believe Americans can gain security by attempting to drive underground or destroy a little band of shabby [Communist Party] men on Fourteenth Street whom we think we can lick by constitutional measures... We think to the extent we create that illusion, ...[it] is a point in favor of Joseph Stalin." Despite these objections, Congress, with the support of a majority of Senate liberals, passed the bill over President Truman's veto.<sup>148</sup>

Also, in late 1950, Los Angeles AVC member and city councilman Ed Roybal opposed three separate "communist registration ordinances" placed before by the city council. Using liberal Cold War Americanism rhetoric, the NPC praised Roybal's

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<sup>148</sup>As McAuliffe notes, Senate liberals, with only a few dissents, voted with the Republican majority to pass the McCarran Internal Security Act, offering even stricter version of the original bill to substitute detention of "subversives" in emergencies for the GOP's registration requirements. The final bill they passed, over Truman's veto, incorporated both of these provisions. See McAuliffe, *Crisis on the Left*, 78-79. For the AVC's lobbying activities, see *AVC Bulletin*, August-September, 1950, 8. Straight's HUAC comments are in *AVC Bulletin*, April, 1950, 2; and, "AVC Testimony on HR. 7595 Before the Committee on House Un-American Activities, House of Representatives, March 30, 1950," MS2144, AVC Records, Ser. 3, Testimonies, box 77, folder 2: 1950-1954, GL. The AVC's Leonard Nikoloric testified with Straight, and provided a detailed critique of the bill that stresses both the AVC's anticommunism and principled opposition to the bill for its multiple infringements of civil liberties, *Ibid.* For press coverage: *Washington Post & Times Herald*, March 31, 1950, 6.

vote as, “an inspiration to those who believe freedom is more important than conformity,” and noted, “We feel as...you do, that the control of communists and other subversive elements in our midst is properly the function of those agencies qualified by experience and training to deal with such problems.” But since Roybal cast “the one dissenting vote on each measure” his action proved fruitless.<sup>149</sup>

The AVC also opposed anti-subversive measures at the state level, but without success. In early 1952, for example, the AVC’s Ben Franklin chapter in Philadelphia, jointly with the local ACLU, lobbied Pennsylvania legislators to defeat the state’s public employee loyalty oath bill, or Pechan Act. Despite these efforts, the powerful state veterans’ lobby, including the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and Amvets, assured that an overwhelming majority of the state assembly passed the bill in December.<sup>150</sup>

The AVC opposed a range of other governmental measures abridging civil liberties. In early July 1954, it supported the enactment of fair rules of procedure for those brought before Congressional committees investigating subversion, and presented its interest in the legislation as a matter of domestic and international significance. As the AVC’s executive director Andrew Rice told the Senate Subcommittee on Rules, “in the cold war between communism and democracy...what America *does* to live up to the democratic ideal speaks louder than what any Voice of America may say. Veterans who have served overseas in the post-

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<sup>149</sup> *AVC Bulletin*, October 1950, 7.

<sup>150</sup> *AVC Bulletin*, January 1952, 3. State senator Albert R. Pechatern authored the bill, and was also state legislative director for the American Legion. As Philip Jenkins noted, the Act’s passage was “a striking tribute to the legislative strength of the organized veterans’ groups and their ‘rowdy steamroller lobby.’” See Philip Jenkins, *Cold War At Home: The Red Scare in Pennsylvania, 1945-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 92-93.

World War II years are particularly aware of this.” Similarly, in April 1957, the AVC denounced as “a dagger in the back of one of our basic freedoms—a free press,” the State Department’s continued denial of a passport to journalist William Worthy, which it revoked in 1956 following his return from reporting on events in China. Absent a policy reversal, the group noted, “the Department must stand guilty of denying information to the American people, rivaling the same kind of restrictions which we so justly speak out against behind the Iron Curtain.” The group continued to oppose passport curbs on alleged subversives, being pushed especially hard by anti-communist conservatives in the late 1950s, as contravening Americans’ basic “right to travel.” In July 1959, for example, it told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that, “A citizen should be free to leave this country without an ‘exit permit’ which the passport has in recent years in large part become.”<sup>151</sup>

Yet these arguments failed to persuade either the State Department or the judiciary to end restrictions on the right to travel. Despite the Supreme Court’s April 1958 ruling in *Kent v. Dulles* that the State Department lacked Congressional authority to deny passports based on individuals “beliefs and associations,” the State Department basically ignored the Court, and continued to deny passports on political

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<sup>151</sup> “Statement of Andrew E. Rice, Executive Director, AVC to the Senate Subcommittee on Rules on behalf of legislation to establish fair rules of procedure for Congressional committee investigations,” July 6, 1954, MS 2144, AVC Records, Ser. 3, Testimonies, box 77, folder 2: 1950-1954, GL. On the Worthy case, see David Cauter, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978), 251. “Reversal of State Department Decision in Worth Passport Case Urged,” April 2, 1957, MS 2144, Ser. 3, Press Releases, box 79, folder 6: 1955-1959, GL. *AVC Bulletin*, January 1959, 3; *AVC Bulletin*, March 1959, 2; “Statement of the AVC on Proposed Passport Legislation before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee,” July 13, 1959, MS 2144, Ser. 3, Testimonies, box 77, folder 3: 1955-1959.

grounds.<sup>152</sup> In July 1959, the United States Court of Appeals ruled unanimously against William Worthy and Waldo Frank, who invoked *Kent* and claimed discrimination since the State Department had approved 40 journalists for travel to China. In his concurring opinion, Justice Warren E. Berger stated the Court's belief that the authority of the Secretary of State to determine travel policy "is political in the highest sense and is not reviewable on any basis in any circumstance by any court."<sup>153</sup> His opinion also demonstrated the double-edged nature of Cold War arguments. As the *New York Times* reported, Berger maintained that limiting the number of passports granted to journalists "was 'a calculated risk' undertaken on the presumption that it would help the ultimate objectives of world peace and stability, reduce tensions and strengthen resistance to communism." Since the Supreme Court "declined to review these decisions," the travel restrictions remained intact.<sup>154</sup>

To protect the civil liberties of federal employees, the AVC also strongly advocated for reform of the government's personnel loyalty-security programs. The group's opposition in early 1955 to the Defense Facilities Protection Act, or Butler bill, aimed at extending the program expanded by Eisenhower's Executive Order 10450 to the nation's defense plants, reflected its chief concerns about the entire edifice of federal loyalty-security measures. The group roundly criticized the Butler bill before the Senate Subcommittee on Government Employee Security Programs for

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<sup>152</sup> See the entry *Kent v. Dulles*, in Kermit L. Hall, James W. Ely, Jr. and Joel B. Grossman, eds., *The Oxford Companion to the Supreme Court of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 558; Cauter, *The Great Fear*, 250-251.

<sup>153</sup> *New York Times* July 7, 1959, 4.

<sup>154</sup> *New York Times*, July 7, 1959, 4; Cauter, *The Great Fear*, 251.

its broad inclusion of non-security related jobs, and lack of proper standards and unfair procedures, including guilt by association and “suspensions without pay,” that resulted in “the indiscriminate bringing of half-baked charges on flimsy or no evidence.” In this, and in virtually all such presentations before Congress, the AVC proclaimed its anticommunist record and status “as an organization...of veterans who fought to prevent tyranny from spreading over the face of the earth.” Like this battle, the present fight against the Butler bill was aimed at “the protection of our country’s government from infiltrations by those who would subvert it...and also from those who, by design or misguided zeal, would in the name of such protection, introduce policies and methods suitable only to the political climate of a totalitarian state.” The group further argued that by trampling over civil liberties, the measure could generate another source of subversion from among those it targeted. “We must beware lest our security program create enemies of state out of once loyal citizens and their children. Unjust repression, investigation and destruction of the right to a livelihood have produced that result in many another country.” In May 1955, the AVC’s Mitchell Cooper told the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee that in giving “absolute power to the Executive to curtail the movements of any citizen who, for whatever reason, was deemed likely to commit ‘subversive acts’” rendered the bill, “as close an approximation to the police state envisaged in the ‘1984’ of George Orwell as we have yet seen proposed.” Furthermore, he declared, “We are fearful this legislation will...so curtail fundamental liberties of our people as to weaken our capacity for valiant self-defense.”<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> “Statement of Lincoln W. Lauterstein, Chairman, Committee on National Affairs, AVC before the Senate Subcommittee on Government Employee Security Programs, Concerning the Administration’s

Given the enormous threat of arbitrary dismissal the Butler bill posed to its membership, organized labor also testified against the measure using Cold War language. As Tom E. Harris, CIO assistant general counsel, told the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee, “If the program this bill authorizes is ever put into effect, we will have taken a long step toward requiring that every worker carry a police card attesting to his loyalty in order to get work. And if that ever happens we will have exchanged the freedom of American democracy for the tyranny of a police state.”<sup>156</sup> Yet despite Cold War arguments, it was the combined lobbying clout of the CIO and the AFL that defeated the measure in the 84<sup>th</sup> Congress.<sup>157</sup>

The AVC also actively intervened to defend the rights of persons subjected to allegations of subversive activity. In early 1956, the Hartford (CT) chapter came to the defense of Connecticut’s Children’s Services director Verne Weed, suspended from her job for harboring “communist sympathies.” The AVC stood out as “the only organization besides the local Social Service unit to urge full protection of Miss Weed’s constitutional rights.” As the chapter’s chairman warned the agency’s trustees, “there was a danger to civil liberties” if they fired Weed “on the basis of a

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personnel security program” June 23 1955, MS 2144, AVC Records, Ser. 3, Testimonies, box 77, folder 3: 1955-1959, GL; and, “‘Mastodon’ Security program Denounced by Veterans Group,” June 23, 1955, Ibid., Ser. 3, Press Releases, box 79, folder 6: 1955-1959, GL; “Statement of Mitchell Cooper Representing AVC before the Internal Security Committee, Senate Judiciary Committee, Opposing S. 681,” May 13, 1955, Ibid., Ser. 3, Testimonies, box 77, folder 3: 1955-1959, GL; and “‘1984’” Police State Seen by Veterans If Butler Bill Is Adopted,” May 13, 1955, Ibid., Ser. 3, Press Releases, box 79, folder 6: 1955-1959, GL; *Washington Post & Times Herald*, May 14, 1955, 2. For a brief discussion of civil liberties abuses under the federal loyalty-security program see, Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 289-291.

<sup>156</sup> *The Washington Post & Times Herald*, July 7, 1955, 2. The Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) and the United Steel Workers of America (USWA) also joined AVC in opposing the Butler bill. See *Washington Post & Times Herald*, May 14, 1955, 2. As the USWA’s Frank A. Hoffman stated, “We recognize the threat of aggression from the outside. On the other hand, we are also concerned with not having ourselves pull down the foundation of this house of democracy.” Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Leon H. Weaver, ed. *Industrial Personnel Security: Cases and Materials* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas Publishers, 1964), 347.

mere allegation of communists ties.” In November 1950, the Massachusetts AVC presented State Department advisor Owen Lattimore (falsely targeted by McCarthy that March as “the top Russian agent” over Alger Hiss), with its Bill of Rights Award for “his outstanding performance in alerting our nation to the existing dangers to our right to freedom of conscience and expression, without which we cannot exist as a democracy.” Likewise, following atomic physicist Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer’s loss of government security clearance in April 1954, after being labeled a “security risk” by the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC), the AVC immediately established a national legal defense fund on his behalf. In a letter to Oppenheimer, and in its public statements, the group praised him for his leadership as “one of the scientific heroes” of the war for developing the atomic weaponry that allowed its members to survive it, and for the bomb’s ongoing contribution, in the face of “Soviet aggression,” to ensuring “the security of the American people.” Additionally, the group proclaimed, it established the fund, “in the hope” that the Security Board’s action against “a man who...has given unstintingly of himself in the service of his country’s government, may awaken the American people to the fundamental injustice of our security review procedures and of the dangers inherent in our present day hysteria.”<sup>158</sup> In short, in the

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<sup>158</sup> *AVC Bulletin*, April 1956, 1. When called before HUAC in September 1956, Weed was listed as one of two Connecticut witnesses who “cannot be found for service of subpoenas.” *New York Times*, September 26, 1956, 24; *AVC Bulletin*, November 1950, 1. For McCarthy’s charge against Lattimore (as quoted here), see Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense*, 136. Bill Mauldin, National Chairman, Mickey Levine, National Vice-Chairman and Lincoln Lauterstein, Chairman, National Affairs Commission to Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, NJ, April 20, 1954, MS 2144, Series 7, Subseries 1, General Correspondence, 1945-1999, box 150, folder 6: 1945-1961 (hereinafter Ser. 7, Subser. 1). As the group told Oppenheimer, “but for your leadership and accomplishment” in developing the bomb, “many of the veterans of that war now living would have met death on a distant isle or atoll in the Pacific.” *Ibid.* Additionally see, “Veterans Establish Oppenheimer Defense Fund,” April 21, 1954, Ser. 3, Press Releases, box 79, folder 5: 1950-1959; *AVC Bulletin*, May 1954, 8; *Washington Post & Times Herald*, April 22, 1954, 8. The revocation of Oppenheimer’s clearance, as Shrecker notes, resulted mainly from his opposition to the H-Bomb, and

AVC's depictions, far from being the subversives McCarthy and others claimed them to be, both Lattimore and Oppenheimer, as defenders of the country's democratic heritage and its national security, were key assets in America's Cold War struggle.

Nevertheless, the AVC's actions did not shield Lattimore from a relentless three-year effort by the Justice Department to convict him for perjury over his alleged communist activities based upon McCarthy's original charge. Furthermore, its defense of Oppenheimer did nothing to stop the AEC review board from permanently revoking his security clearance in June 1954.<sup>159</sup>

In sharp contrast to its conservative adversaries, who, in the name of combating "subversion" tried to limit academic freedom, the AVC intervened to defend traditions of free inquiry and discussion in the nation's educational system. In early 1955, the group's Pacific Northwest Region "strongly criticized" the University of Washington's Chancellor for blocking a lecture by Dr. Oppenheimer. As the unit declared, "It is the function of a university...in a free land...to utilize the fruits of that freedom in the quest for greater scientific advancement." Simultaneously, it praised the University of Oregon "for fulfilling its academic responsibility" after it "refused to cancel several scheduled appearances of Dr. Oppenheimer at Oregon state colleges." Likewise, in early 1956, the Montgomery County, MD AVC chapter "commended" three local board of education officials for their determined, though failed, effort to defeat a ban on a sociology textbook "because it allegedly 'advocated opinions'."<sup>160</sup>

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because during WWII, "he had tried to conceal the identity of the friend who transmitted a Soviet offer to spy." Shrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*, 293.

<sup>159</sup>For the government's actions against Lattimore and Oppenheimer respectively, see Caute, *The Great Fear*, 320-321 and 478-479. As Caute notes, the Justice Department finally dropped its case against Lattimore on June 28, 1955. *Ibid.*, 321.

<sup>160</sup>*AVC Bulletin*, April 1955, 6. The banned textbook was *Social Living*, by Washington State College rural sociology Professor Paul H. Landis. See *Washington Post & Times Herald*, January 1956, C8.

But the AVC's intervention on behalf of Oppenheimer at the University of Washington proved inconsequential. The ban sharply divided the campus, and generated two months of prolonged and acrimonious internal debate. Finally, in April 1955, an agreement between the faculty senate and the University's president to involve faculty in future decisions impinging on academic freedom largely settled the controversy. The president officially ended the affair by personally inviting Oppenheimer to lecture at the International Congress of Theoretical Physics held on campus in September 1956.<sup>161</sup>

The AVC's civil liberties advocacy in education inevitably brought it into direct confrontation with conservative veterans groups. In late 1956, the AVC's Central Nassau, (NY) chapter "lodged a protest" with the Levittown school board over its decision "to select two representatives from local veterans organizations to review textbooks." As the unit explained, "AVC considers it morally wrong to set up a committee to examine study material since such a function properly belongs to the educational administration of the school." Further, in June 1958, the AVC's national chairman lauded the Hanover, New Jersey school board's refusal to fire the teacher responsible for allowing the school newspaper to publish essays questioning the U.S. atomic bomb attack on Japan, despite pressure from the Legion and VFW to do so. As the group told the board, "As American war veterans we are appalled at those who speak in the name of patriotism to discourage the free expression of ideas." Rather than suppressing free thought in schools, the group stated, "our country needs teachers who will stimulate critical thinking by young men and women since such

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<sup>161</sup> Jane A. Sanders, "The University of Washington and the Controversy over J. Robert Oppenheimer," *Northwest Quarterly* 70 (January, 1979): 8, 17, 18-19.

independent judgment is the basis of our democratic way of life.” Also, while the Legion opposed Alger Hiss’s speaking engagement at Princeton University in early 1956, the AVC ‘s New Jersey State Council supported the free speech principles underlying the students’ invitation to Hiss. As the council declared, “since the days of McCarthy’s reign of Terror, ‘portions of the strong framework of our Constitution have been chipped away’ and ‘self-appointed groups decide what should be read, what should be seen and what should be heard.’”<sup>162</sup>

Additionally, the AVC resisted the efforts of conservative veterans’ groups to impose their political preferences on others through film bans and other restrictions on free expression among filmmakers. In February 1953, the AVC’s Motion Picture chapter denounced the Legion’s nation-wide campaign to prevent showings of Chaplin’s *Limelight* as “an attempt to control the nation’s screens” and “a gross violation of the basic democratic principle of freedom of the arts.” The unit’s chairman also urged readers of his letter to the *New York Times*, to ask local theaters to show *Limelight* in order to protect “our prerogative to see all films “ despite the efforts of “authoritarian pressure groups.”<sup>163</sup> Yet, lacking a large membership base and adequate resources, the AVC had no effective means of countering the massive and highly successful Legion boycott of *Limelight* discussed in the previous chapter.

Further, in early 1954, the AVC’s New Jersey State Council, supported locally by the National Conference of Christians and Jews and the Presbyterian churches, denounced efforts by a unit of the conservative Catholic War Veterans (CWV) to ban

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<sup>162</sup> *AVC Bulletin*, November 1956, 4; *AVC Bulletin*, June 1958, 1; *AVC Bulletin*, April 1956, 1.

<sup>163</sup> See the AVC’s Motion Picture Chapter’s letter to the editor, “Legion Action on Film Opposed,” *New York Times*, February 7, 1953, 14. For the Legion’s campaign against Chaplin see the previous Chapter.

showings in Red Bank of *The High Wall*, an Anti-Defamation League educational film on confronting racial prejudice. As the AVC council declared, “Being a veteran does not give anyone the right to decide the likes and dislikes of our citizens.”<sup>164</sup> At least one local parent-teacher group cancelled its showing of *The High Wall* after the CWV, citing reports from the New Jersey Anti-Communist League, charged that the film was “pink.” However, local CWV officials promptly rescinded their call to ban the film after meeting jointly with the Anti-Defamation League and other area CWV units, who informed them that the film focused on the “prejudices suffered by a Polish Catholic family [and] had been shown extensively by Catholic youth groups and parochial schools.” and subsequently rescinded its call to ban the film<sup>165</sup> In short, the AVC’s protest failed to influence the CWV to reverse its stance.

The AVC nonetheless persistently opposed the Legion’s attacks on Hollywood filmmakers through the late 1950s. In February 1960, the AVC’s national chairman, Mickey Levine, asked the League of Women Voters, the ACLU, trade unions and other liberal allies to support its efforts to halt the Legion’s campaign against independent film director Sidney Kramer for his refusal to fire blacklisted screenwriter Nedrick Young. As Levine told these groups “Liberals have been too complacent or too pusillanimous with respect to the bullying tactics of the Legion Leadership”<sup>166</sup> In his letter of support to Kramer, Levine praised the director “for the patriotic, truly American position you have taken in resisting the mob pressure of the

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<sup>164</sup> *AVC Bulletin*, April 1954, 8.

<sup>165</sup> *New York Times*, March 12, 1954, 9.

<sup>166</sup> *AVC Bulletin*, February 1960, 3.

American Legion...to force you to disregard your constitutional rights and the rights of others.”<sup>167</sup>

The AVC also opposed the Legion’s repeated calls for a federal investigation of the ACLU, based on its allegedly “subversive” defense of the constitutional rights of radicals. Immediately after the Legion’s national convention passed a resolution in late August 1952 demanding a probe of the ACLU by federal authorities, the group deplored the action as “a reckless and dangerous blow at the American concept of liberty.” The AVC also pointed out that the ACLU, in keeping with its own anticommunist record, “bars Communists from membership,” and that “the darling of many Legionnaires,” General Douglas MacArthur, had consulted with the ACLU regarding civil liberties policies for occupied Japan. Further, declared AVC’s then chairman Curtis Campaigne, the Legion’s convention action revealed, “not only that it has no clear idea of the real threat of Communism, but that its concept of ‘Americanism’ in truth subverts the meaning of the term.” When the Legion’s September 1953 convention reiterated its demand for the investigation, the AVC extolled the ACLU’s record and pointed out that the previous resolution “was ignored by the federal government and attacked by 35 leading newspapers.” Indeed, for its part, the *New York Times* commended the ACLU as “a stout defender of the principles upon which the nation was founded” and for having, “denounced unfair attacks on religious, racial and political minorities here and likewise in Communist countries.” ACLU executive director Patrick Malin also immediately rebuked the Legion’s 1953 resolution. While Malin noted the Legion should “learn how...to oppose what a man says while defending his constitutional right to say it,” the ACLU,

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<sup>167</sup> *New York Times*, February 16, 1960, 31.

he also declared, “believes that the structure of freedom must be even more zealously guarded today in the face of the danger of the world-wide Soviet conspiracy.” As the AVC and its liberal allies implied, it was the Legion, not the ACLU, which was betraying the democratic rights being defended in the Cold War, freedoms for which all veterans, since the founding, had sacrificed to uphold. As the *New York Times* concluded, “It is too bad that so many of our veterans, as represented at Legion conventions, don’t seem to believe in the principles for which they fought so valiantly.”<sup>168</sup>

The AVC also severely criticized the counter-subversive activities undertaken directly by the Legion and other veterans groups. In late January 1954, the role of a local VFW post in Norwalk, Connecticut in conducting a “secret committee to ferret out ‘communistically inclined’ members of the community” and report the names of these persons to the FBI came to light. News of the Norwalk incident quickly sparked a national debate among veterans groups concerning the appropriateness of such activities. The Iowa VFW adjutant deplored the Norwalk unit’s behavior. “We have

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<sup>168</sup> On the Legion’s calls for the federal government to investigate the ACLU, see the preceding Chapter. The Legion’s resolution called upon HUAC, the Justice Department and the Subversive Activities Control Board to conduct the investigation. See *Washington Post & Times Herald*, August 28, 1952, 5; *AVC Bulletin*, August-September 1952, 2; “Legion Hoodwinked Say’s AVC,” October 8, 1953, MS 2144, Ser. 3, Press Releases, box 79, folder 5: 1950-1954, GL; see the editorial “‘Exposing’ Civil Liberties,” *New York Times*, September 5, 1953, 14; for Malin’s comments, *New York Times* September 4, 1953, 7; *Ibid.*, September 5, 1953, 14. (Malin also said, the ACLU, “believes that the structure of freedom must be even more zealously guarded today in the face of the danger of the world-wide communist conspiracy.” *New York Times*, September 3, 1953, 10.); for the *New York Times*’ concluding remark quoted here, *Ibid.*, September 5, 1953, 14. The ACLU’s 1940 membership bar on Communists actually pertained to any “governing committee,” but throughout the 1950s, the national body backed away from defending the rights of individuals such as Julius and Ethel Rosenberg and Owen Lattimore, while local branches contested these policies and pursued a much more progressive approach in their civil liberties activism. Some ACLU members disenchanted with the national office’s unwillingness to defend radicals and other victims of McCarthyism founded the Emergency Civil Liberties Committee (ECLC) in 1951. See Judy Kutulas, *The American Civil Liberties Union and the Making of Modern Liberalism, 1930-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 2-73, 145, 181, 182, 185-186.

not asked our posts in Iowa to an action like that,” he declared, “and we would not approve of it even if any of them did. The V.F.W. members are not spy hunters.” But reports from elsewhere indicated otherwise. New Mexico’s VFW commander reported his unit operated a statewide committee to investigate “suspected Communist activities” which reported names to the FBI. The Massachusetts VFW commander declared, “We have been working hand in glove with the FBI for fourteen or fifteen years.” In response to the Norwalk case, the VFW’s national Americanism chairman held that such investigative work properly belonged to the FBI, and declared, “activities of this sort by individuals who have no experience; charging individuals with being Communists without proof is a procedure fraught with danger to our country.” The AVC’s Massachusetts chairman declared that the Legion’s activities of reporting alleged subversives to the Massachusetts Commission on Communism were “alien and repugnant to the great American tradition of free expression,” and therefore served to undermine the country’s most effective means for resisting subversion. The AVC’s national chairman, Bill Mauldin, denounced the Norwalk incident, and similar cases of “self-appointed” counter-subversive activity, as akin to, “the Kremlin system of neighbor spying on neighbor, children spying on parents.” As Mauldin declared, “We do not need vigilante tactics which violate the spirit of true Americanism.”<sup>169</sup>

In an attempt to prevent abuses of civil liberties as occurred in Norwalk, Mauldin issued a call on January 29 for all national veterans’ organizations to meet in order to develop a “genuine code of conduct” aimed at “preserving individual liberty

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<sup>169</sup> *New York Times*, January 30, 1954, 6. For the Massachusetts AVC’s criticism of the Legion, see *AVC Bulletin*, February 1954, 4; for Mauldin’s quote, see *Washington Post & Times Herald*, January 30, 1954, 6; *AVC Bulletin*, February 1954, 1, 4.

in a time of national crisis.” As Mauldin stated, “Veterans more than any other segment of the nation should set an example by their own behavior.” In an effort to claim patriotic legitimacy for this endeavor, the AVC chose February 22, Washington’s Birthday, as the date for the conference.<sup>170</sup>

Ahead of the proposed meeting, the Connecticut VFW, on February 12, ordered its affiliates to “withhold further action or publicity on Americanism or subversive activities.” But the announcement, as the *Washington Post* reported, “immediately drew a number of protests, including some from veterans organizations leaders.” The national VFW declared that the order did not come from headquarters, and Legion national commander Arthur J. Connell stated, “that the Legion is not made up of ‘counter spies or prosecutors’.” Veterans groups also ignored Mauldin’s call for a conference. In February, the *Bulletin* reported, “only Amvets and the Blinded Veterans Association had indicated a willingness to sit down with...AVC.” The national commanders of the VFW and the Legion simply “sent their regrets.” Months later, in May 1954, the AVC reported that Amvets replied with “a routine acknowledgment only,” while the Disabled Veterans of America (DAV) offered “no response.”<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> For Mauldin’s call for a code of conduct conference, see *Washington Post & Times Herald*, January 30, 1954, 6; and, *AVC Bulletin*, February 1954, 1, 4.

<sup>171</sup> For the Connecticut VFW’s order see *Washington Post & Times Herald*, February 13, 1954, A. The responses of the national veterans’ groups to AVC’s code of conduct conference are in, *AVC Bulletin*, February 1954, 1; and, Lincoln W. Lauterstein, Chairman NAC, “Memorandum to all members, Commission on National Affairs,” May 4, 1954, MS 2144, Ser. 7, Subser. 2, General Correspondence, box 155, folder 4, (file 1): Cooke, Paul—Correspondence, 1950-1954.” The Blinded Veterans Association’s commitment consisted of “a personal endorsement” by its president pending its convention’s approval. *Ibid.*, GL. For additional internal discussion by the AVC of its policy position on the Norwalk case see, Lincoln W. Lauterstein, “Report of the National Affairs Committee on the Annexed Statement, n.d., and Lauterstein, “Proposed Statement of the AVC on the Role of Organizations and Individuals in the Reporting of Alleged ‘Subversives,’” March 31, 1954, both attachments in, MS 2144, Ser. 7., *Ibid.*, GL. The AVC also used of the Norwalk incident to support its demands for the adoption of fair rules procedures by Congressional investigating committees. See

In late July 1954, the AVC called upon the national commanders of the Legion, VFW, Catholic War Veterans and Amvets “to repudiate” the participation of their local units, as members of New York’s Joint Committee on Communism, in sponsoring a testimonial dinner honoring former McCarthy Subcommittee counsel Roy Cohn. Their silence, however, further highlighted the AVC’s inability to influence them. The AVC ‘s critique covered the whole list of charges McCarthy and Cohn made against the military in the Army hearings, including their attacks on Eisenhower’s loyalty, along with their “sordid” work on behalf of their assistant G. David Schine. As the AVC’s Bill Mauldin and Andrew Rice told the veterans’ groups, “We urge you to place in balance McCarthy, Roy Cohn, and David Schine, and on the other side, President Eisenhower, General Marshall, Secretary Stevens, General MacArthur, General Zwicker and the loyal men of our armed forces, and then to speak out with us against this monstrous farce.” In September 1954, AVC was still waiting for the veterans’ groups to take action on the Cohn dinner.<sup>172</sup>

Despite such treatment by the other veterans’ groups, the AVC did nevertheless manage to claim some important victories on the civil liberties front.

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“Statement of Andrew E. Rice, Executive Director, AVC, to the Subcommittee on Legislative Procedure of the House Rules Committee, February, 25, 1954, MS 2144, Ser. 3, Testimonies, box 77, folder 2: 1950-1954, GL.

<sup>172</sup> “AVC Urges Veterans Repudiate Cohn Testimonial,” July 28, 1954, MS 2144, Ser. 3, Press Releases, box 79, folder 5: 1950-1954, GL; Bill Mauldin, National Chairman and Andrew E. Rice, National Executive Director, AVC to Mr. Arthur Connell, National Commander, American Legion, Indianapolis, IN, July 27 1954, Ibid. The AVC’s letter to Connell also went to Mr. Wayne E. Richards, Commander in Chief, Veterans of Foreign Wars; Commander Thomas J. Cuite, Catholic War Veterans, and Mr. Henry Mahady, National Commander, Amvets., Ibid. As the AVC declared, “no veterans group should endorse Cohn” given “how he maliciously tried to extort special privilege [for Schine] through threats and blackmail” which served “to undermine the principle of equal service by all in the armed forces.” Ibid. Also on the AVC’s repudiation effort see, *New York Times*, July 28, 1954, 8. On the G. David Schine affair, see Griffith, *The Politics of Fear*, 244-246. For a detailed report of the Cohn testimonial dinner, see *New York Times*, July 29, 1954, 9; *AVC Bulletin*, September 1954, 1. As late as October, the Baltimore AVC requested that the Maryland Legion “withdraw its endorsement” of the Cohn dinner, *AVC Bulletin*, October 1954, 1.

Beginning in November 1949, the AVC's Harvard University chapter led an effort to defeat the Naval ROTC loyalty oath regulation forcing members to "inform their naval superiors of any fellow students they see at any meeting of a *subversive* organization." The chapter's resolution, sent to AVC members in Congress, including Senators Lodge and Paul Douglas, termed the measure "a menace to American freedom" and "a special threat to the academic freedom of the American student." In April 1950, the AVC reported, "Word has been quietly passed to the Naval ROTC officers that the informer or stool pigeon clause in the...oath has been dropped...not only at Harvard but at all other colleges having Naval ROTC programs." In January 1955, the AVC also claimed its protest to President Eisenhower (during an interview the previous spring,) lay behind the Justice Department's December 1954 order permitting the transfer of federal employees to "non-sensitive posts pending the outcome of agency [loyalty] investigations." In February 1955, a campaign by the Hartford (CT) chapter succeeded in having the Connecticut Board of Education "rescind by a 7 to 1 vote a newly adopted and loosely drawn code for revoking teacher licenses."<sup>173</sup>

Further, in October 1956, an amicus curiae brief filed by the Washington, D.C. AVC chapter, in early 1955, helped to overturn a decision by the District licensing office to deny a second-hand dealer's permit to a witness who had invoked his Fifth Amendment privileges before HUAC. As the AVC's brief argued, the original order ensured a system of security in which, "every citizen and resident

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<sup>173</sup>For the Harvard ROTC campaign, see *AVC Bulletin*, January 1950, 3; and *AVC Bulletin*, April 1950, 2. AVC noted that in its interview with Eisenhower, it had protested the issue of suspensions without pay for persons undergoing a loyalty-security investigation. See the editorial, "Man Bites Dog," in *AVC Bulletin*, January 1955, 2; *AVC Bulletin*, February 1955, 4.

would be subject to the vagaries and hostilities of a whole host of officialdom.” Also, the AVC stood alone among veterans’ groups in advocating for full restoration of job and disability pension rights for James Kutcher, a paraplegic WWII veteran dismissed from his Veterans Administration job in 1948 due to his membership in the Socialist Workers Party, and for making allegedly treasonous statements. The VA reinstated Kutcher to his job in June 1956, after the U.S. Court of Appeals ruled in his favor. As the *AVC Bulletin* editorialized on news of the reinstatement, his “greatest ‘crime’ seems to have been holding unpopular views and belonging to the ‘wrong’ organization.”<sup>174</sup>

As these examples reveal, the AVC’s activism centered on the discourse of liberal Cold War Americanism netted some, although very limited, victories. Yet the group’s achievements were not enough to overcome the Legion’s domination. The AVC lacked the Legion’s large membership, and those key resources that came with, it to effectively counter, for example, its picketing and shutdowns of Chaplin’s films. The complete disregard the Legion and the VFW showed for the group’s call for them to address the civil liberties abuses resulting from the red-hunting activities of their local units, as in the Norwalk incident, reflected their power. Despite its willingness,

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<sup>174</sup> On the DC licensing case see: *AVC Bulletin*, March 1955, 4; *AVC Bulletin*, May 1955, 3; and, *AVC Bulletin*, November 1956, 4. On the Kutcher case, “Vets Protest in Kutcher Case, December 30, 1955, MS 2144, Ser. 3, Press Releases, box 79, folder 6: 1955-1959, GL; AVC’s executive director Kenneth Birkhead, *New York Post* editor James Wechsler, and Greater NY CIO Industrial Union Council’s Secretary-Treasurer Morris Iushewitz, spoke at a New York City rally for Kutcher, *AVC Bulletin*, February 1956, 4; also, the editorial “Kutcher Wins a Round,” *AVC Bulletin*, April, 1956, 2; editorial, “Reward After 8 Years,” *AVC Bulletin*, June 1956, 2; the government ended its efforts to evict Kutcher from his federal housing project in 1958, leading his (non-AVC) defense committee to conclude its activities, *AVC Bulletin*, December 1958, 1; in January 1956, the *New York Times* reported, “The grounds for the accusation against Kutcher were the unsworn and unsupported assertion of an unidentified informant that he had heard Kutcher, in 1950 or 1951, urge strikes to paralyze the Government, defile the American flag, and say that the Government was composed of ‘cheaters and crooks who oppress the working people.’” See the editorial, “Proof of Treason,” *New York Times*, January 11, 1956, 12; for the gross unfairness of Kutcher’s initial VA hearing which cut off his monthly pension for his wartime injuries, see *New York Times*, December 31, 1955, 1.

early on, to confront McCarthy, many rank-and-file veterans, even some from within the AVC, identified with the Senator as a fellow veteran and anticommunist, while embracing him as a Cold War hero. The decision of the Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights, chaired by McCarthy foe Missouri Democrat Tom Hennings, in September 1955 to have the Legion act as the voice of the nation's veterans at its Constitution Day hearings, held to celebrate the 178<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bill of Rights and to solicit ways of strengthening them, underscored its political influence over the Congress, and within the political culture at large. True to his organization's conservative Americanism, the Legion's representative Don Wilson urged the Subcommittee, "To determine the extent to which we, as a people, are entitled to protection against those who would defy the Congress, deceive the courts, destroy the Government, and enslave the people while proclaiming that the Constitution prohibits their being unmasked." In voicing its protest against the Legion's role in the hearings, the AVC petitioned the Subcommittee in absentia. While the group congratulated the committee for its efforts "to bulwark our constitutional rights against the erosions of which Chief Justice Warren has spoken," it denounced the Legion's appearance before it as "a travesty." Further, the AVC declared, "Let the Legion speak for itself. But how can your subcommittee, faced with the Legion's record, accredit the Legion as spokesman, in the field of civil and other constitutional rights, for all the veterans who have sacrificed to nurture the Tree of Liberty?"<sup>175</sup> The compelling nature of that

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<sup>175</sup> On the Senate Subcommittee's selection of the Legion see, *Washington Post & Times Herald*, September 8, 15. Former national commander Don Wilson served as the Legion's spokesman. *Ibid.*; for reportage of the Subcommittee's hearings, including Wilson's statement, *Washington Post & Times Herald*, September 18, 1955, A1. On Senator Hennings's anti-McCarthy actions see Griffith, *The Politics of Fear*, 178-181, passim; 182, 183-184, 185, 282. For AVC's statements against the Legion's selection see, "Legion Appearance Before Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights Labeled 'Travesty'" September 14, 1955, MS 2144, Ser. 3, Press Releases, box 79, folder 6: 1955-1959, GL;

question became all the more evident as the AVC tackled the other major component of its Americanism program, the pressing issue of securing full civil rights for the nation's African-American citizens.

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*AVC Bulletin*, September 1955, 1; see the editorial, "Does This Man Speak for You?," *AVC Bulletin*, October 1955, 2; and, *New York Times*, September 14, 1955, 37.

## Chapter 4: The AVC and the Fight for Civil Rights

In its 1956 Memorial Day commemoration, the Springfield, Massachusetts AVC Chapter observed that, “In the present days of international tension, the real meaning of Memorial Day becomes ever more clear to all of us. This is the time for dedication to the great principles of our American creed—liberty and justice for all. All citizens should take time to contemplate their contributions to these great goals—for increased brotherhood and understanding at home and for the extension of liberty and democracy abroad.” Furthermore, it declared, “Our thoughts...turn to the brave men and women who gave their lives so that our ideals might survive. We can best honor their memory by increasing the importance of the individual and his freedom. Our nation has become great and envied because of this emphasis and we shall maintain our place as long as we stress this concept. In the world-wide struggle against Communism and other totalitarian movements, this has been our most important psychological weapon.” Later that year, the AVC’s national board meeting in Boston (MA) declared that, “[O]n this Veterans Day of 1956 freedom and peace in many places are in short supply. There is no freedom in parts of our own country where freedom’s mantle does not fall on all alike. As soldier-veterans we fought for a way of life that permitted no second-class citizenship Government, business, labor and the church are marching ahead in the struggle for civil rights while veterans’ organizations are lagging behind. As citizen-veterans we should lead this vital effort.”<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> *AVC Bulletin*, June, 1956, 3; “National Board of the American Veterans Committee...Veterans Day Statement,” November 11, 1954, MS 2144, American Veterans Committee Records, Series 3, Press

These commemorations underscore the importance of cultural pluralism in shaping the language of liberal Americanism articulated by many veterans to address their concerns about racial inequality and injustice they confronted in 1950s. As Gary Gerstle has shown, cultural pluralism, or the notion of equality between differing racial and ethnic groups came to the forefront of American consciousness during and immediately after WWII. While government wartime propaganda emphasized the ideals of tolerance and brotherhood among all people to foster national unity, the revelations of Nazi atrocities in the death camps further increased its acceptance among many Americans.<sup>177</sup> Also, the melding of pluralist ideals and the nation's Cold War goals evident in these two events reflected what Mary Dudziak has recently identified as one of the postwar civil rights movement's main tactical maneuvers to induce federal officials to respond to its demands. As Dudizak has shown, reformers

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Releases, box 79, folder 6, 1955-1959, Special Collections Research Center, Gelman Library, George Washington University, Washington, DC (hereinafter: MS 2144, Ser 3., Press Releases, AVC Records, GL).

<sup>177</sup> For Gerstle's discussion of cultural pluralism, see Gary Gerstle's, *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in A Textile City, 1914-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 289-302. As Gerstle notes, in the immediate postwar years, cultural pluralism supplanted a 1930s "class-based construction of Americanism," which many workers, especially radicals, used to assert what they claimed as their rights to equal power with capital. While emphasizing the equality and unity of all religious creeds, races and ethnicities, pluralism relegated working class Americanism references to class animosities between labor and capital as another form of "bigotry." Ibid., 301. While pluralism's message of national cultural unity marginalized appeals based on divisive class distinctions, the Cold War, in turn, by shattering the prewar liberal-left alliance and suppressing radical dissent, further diminished class-based critiques of economic inequality within left-of-center reform languages. As Dudziak notes, "The primacy of anticommunism in postwar American politics and culture left a very narrow space for criticism of the status quo," which, "kept discussions of broad-based social change, or a linking of race and class, off the agenda." Under these circumstances, Americanism also became constricted, "During the early Cold War years, 'Americanism' came to be identified with support of the status quo, and the unqualified defense of American democracy." Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), fn 28, 259, and 13. For two excellent examinations of the demise of the liberal-left alliance and the resulting eclipse of class-based economic critiques in the 1940s Cold War period see, Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) and, Nelson Lichtenstein and Robert Korstad, "Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and the Early Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of American History* 75, No. 3 (December 1988): 786-811.

developed a Cold War civil rights discourse that linked the nation's strategic Cold War needs to the cause of racial justice. In using this language, civil rights advocates played upon the desire of United States foreign policy makers to project an unsullied image of American democracy in order to counter Communists' propaganda efforts to win hearts and minds abroad, especially among populations of color in Asia and Africa. By drawing attention to the gap between the country's democratic ideals and the harsh realities of racial inequality, reformers sought to pressure the government into accepting their demands for expanding civil rights at home. As Dudziak has noted, "Following WWII, anything that undermined the image of American democracy was seen as threatening world peace and aiding the Soviet aspirations to dominate the world."<sup>178</sup> In the context of a conservative era, and confronted with considerable resistance to racial change, Cold War discourse gave reformers an ability to create political space in order to advance their agenda.

As these commemorations suggests, by incorporating Cold War civil rights discourse into its Americanism program for racial reform, the AVC played an integral role in the construction of the 1950s civil rights movement. Also, the AVC's deployment of liberal Americanism in pursuit of racial justice, serves to further call into question and complicate notions of a single conservative Americanism at work in the 1950s. Throughout the decade, the AVC used Cold War liberal Americanism in an effort to advance fundamental civil rights change across a broad range of areas affecting American life, including private and public sector employment, housing, the active duty military, and the administration of federally mandated veterans' benefits

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<sup>178</sup> Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 11-15; for Duziak's quote, *Ibid.*, 27.

involving education and health care. Nonetheless, despite the AVC's vigorous application of liberal Americanism discourse to the cause civil rights reform, its notable lack of success in realizing its goals points to, and underscores, the dominance of the conservative Americanism wielded by its adversaries in this period.

The AVC served as one of the nation's most determined and aggressive advocates for civil rights advancement in the 1950s. The group's internal reorganization in early 1952, re-emphasized its commitment to civil rights as one of the two pillars of its postwar Americanism program, and that April, it could rightly announce that, "we are the only veterans' organization fighting for civil rights."<sup>179</sup> As in its fight to protect and advance civil liberties, the AVC promoted civil rights reform by highlighting the contradictions between America's stated commitments to ensuring freedom and equal rights of citizenship to all, and its undemocratic tolerance of racial inequality. By pointing out that segregation and other manifestations of racial injustice fed the Soviet propaganda mill, the AVC sought to exploit the country's anxieties over the possibilities of domestic subversion and the prospects of winning the external Cold War.

As the AVC pushed forward on the civil rights front, it served as a key ally within the larger network of liberal organizations, civil rights groups and individuals working on behalf of tolerance and racial justice. In 1951, the ADL provided funds and resources to set up the AVC's first annual George Norris Award, (named after the famed populist-progressive Nebraska Senator) to honor "the AVC chapter, state

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<sup>179</sup> For this 1952 program commitment see, Memorandum, L.C. Pakiser, AVC National Executive Director to All Chapter Chairmen, May 15, 1952, MS 2144, AVC Records, Ser. 7, General Correspondence, Subseries 2, Cooke, Paul—Correspondence., 1950-2002, box 155, folder 5: 1955-1959, GL (hereinafter Ser. 7, Subser. 2; *AVC Bulletin*, April 1952, 2.

council or area council which has, during the preceding year performed the most outstanding service in the field of civil rights. The AVC also developed close collaborative ties to the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ,) the annual sponsor of national “Brotherhood Week” which promoted “amity, understanding and cooperation” among Protestants, Catholics and Jews, and the abolition of “inter-group prejudices” from American life. In 1953, the AVC’s Washington D.C. chapter and NCCJ’s Cleveland area affiliate co-sponsored an art exhibit on improving “human relations,” featuring a speech by NCCJ’s president. The AVC also regularly promoted the NCCJ’s work and publications among its members and other veterans through its national newspaper, *The AVC Bulletin*. In late 1955, the New Jersey State AVC joined together with the NCCJ, Trenton’s (NJ) Council on Human Relations, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP,) and the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rth (ADL) to sponsor a “Brotherhood in Action” exhibit at the New Jersey State Fair.<sup>180</sup>

Throughout the 1950s, nationally and locally, the AVC and the NAACP maintained close bonds and a strong working alliance. In May 1950, the NAACP’s District of Columbia Branch honored the AVC’s counsel, Phineas Indritz, for his considerable work in filing Supreme Court amicus curiae briefs “involving basic civil rights of minorities.” Also, in mid-February 1952, the group conferred its first “AVC Brotherhood Award,” on NAACP executive secretary Walter White. In October

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<sup>180</sup> “Report of Committee on the George Norris Award for Civil Rights for Year Ending May, 1951,” MS 2144 AVC Records, Ser. 7, Subser. 1, box 150, folder 6: General Correspondence, (file 2) 1945-1961. *AVC Bulletin*, March 1951, 1; *Ibid.*, May 1952, 1; Leonard Aries, Executive Director, AVC Washington, DC Region to Dr. Paul Cooke, Exec. Committee, Washington, DC AVC Chapter No. 1, Nov 18, 1954, AVC Records, Ser. 7, Subser. 2, “Cooke, Paul—Correspondence, box 155, folder 5 (file 2): 1955-1959, GL; *AVC Bulletin*, Jan. 1952, 4; *Ibid.*, December 1955, 3.

1957, the AVC entered an amicus brief backing NAACP's U.S. Supreme Court case against Alabama's attempt to thwart its activities on the basis that it was specifically an inter-racial organization in violation of the state's laws. The May 1956 AVC National Planning Board (NPC) meeting in Chicago featured NAACP Chief Counsel Thurgood Marshall as its "honored guest and principal speaker." In 1954, the AVC told the NAACP national convention that, "We are proud to be working together for the common goal of justice for all men."<sup>181</sup> Early in 1956, AVC reported that its Cleveland Freedom Chapter filed an amicus brief supporting the NAACP school desegregation suit in Hillsboro, Ohio. When the AVC, in April, 1950, sought to reestablish its organizational presence in St. Louis (MO) following its bruising factional fight to oust its Communist membership, it contacted the city's local NAACP to lay out its past four years record of successful work on behalf of the group in Tulsa, Oklahoma. As Pakiser noted, "In that...drive we recruited for the Tulsa Branch of the NAACP through our AVC contacts, in labor unions, the university, and women's groups, over 100 white members, which made the Tulsa Branch, I believe, the first genuinely interracial NAACP Branch in the Southwest." As Pakiser assured Witherspoon, "We fight Jim Crow wherever he rears his ugly head, and our opposition to discrimination is one of the principal tenets of our faith."<sup>182</sup> Coming so recently after the group's fierce and publicized factional battles, and given the

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<sup>181</sup> *AVC Bulletin*, May, 1950, 6; on White, *Washington Post & Times Herald*, February 16, 1952, B2.; *AVC Bulletin*, Oct, 1957, 1; *Ibid.*, April, 1956,1; *Ibid.*, July, 1954, 1. NAACP Executive Secretary Roy Wilkens reaffirmed the relationship in the spring of 1955 when acknowledged a congratulatory letter to his organization from AVC: "We of the NAACP are proud of our relationship with the American Veterans Committee and we look forward to cooperation on mutual problems in the future." *AVC Bulletin*, May 1955, 2.

<sup>182</sup> *AVC Bulletin*, Feb, 1956, 3; L.C. Pakiser, Executive Director to Mr. Robert Witherspoon, President, St. Louis Branch NAACP, April 12, 1950, MS 2144, AVC Records, Series 9, Local Chapters (hereinafter Ser. 9), box 190, folder 10: Brooklyn, New York Chapter #31, 1950-1959, GL.

renewal of anti-red hysteria nationally, Pakiser's inclusion of the Tulsa story was likely an attempt to convey to Witherspoon that the AVC was safe to work with.

The AVC also worked on civil rights with a number of leading House and Senate advocates, such as Illinois Senator Paul H. Douglas. As one of the foremost Democratic Party Senate leaders behind the push in Congress for enactment of a national civil rights bill, Douglas not only held membership in the AVC, from at least 1956, he also served on the group's National Advisory Council (NAC). Another important civil rights ally in the House, was WWII combat veteran and New York liberal Republican Jacob Javits, who joined the AVC not long after its inception. Also, leading civil rights advocate Congressman Charles C. Diggs, an African-American Democrat representing Detroit, (MI), joined Douglas on the NAC in early fall, 1956.<sup>183</sup>

The AVC also maintained an active presence in major civil rights conferences and rallies. In January 1950, AVC joined with 3,500 delegates originating from some 60 national groups, in the National Emergency Civil Rights Mobilization in Washington, D.C. held by participants, "to demand...early passage of the FEPC and the entire Truman Civil Rights Program." In early 1952, the group sent a 10-member delegation, led by its national chairman Michael Straight, to the Washington D.C. meeting of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, chaired by the NAACP's Walter White. The delegation gathered with its fellow liberal coalition members,

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<sup>183</sup> For Douglas, *AVC Bulletin*, September 1956, 1, and *Ibid.*, March, 1958, 1; on Javits, *Ibid.*, May, 1954, 3. Javits served in combat in both the European and Pacific Theaters with the Chemical Warfare Service from 1941-1944. See his biographical entry in, *The Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774-Present* at <http://bioguide.congress.gov>; for Diggs, *AVC Bulletin*, September, 1956, 1. On Douglas's civil rights leadership generally, and role in the 1957 national civil rights bill, see Nichols, *A Matter of Justice: Eisenhower and the Beginning of the Civil Rights Revolution*, (New York: Simon Schuster, 2007), 150, 161, 238, 246 and 253. For Javits's civil rights advocacy, *Ibid.*, 32, 248, 253.

including the ADL, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) Americans for Democratic Action (ADA,) and the American Federation of Labor (AFL), as White declared, “to voice our demand for the adoption of a majority cloture rule...the enactment of the civil rights program, and to make known to Congress and to political leaders our firm intention of holding them accountable...on these matters.” In early 1956, AVC members from across the country met with 3,000 civil rights activists at a three-day “assembly for Civil Rights,” in Washington, D.C., which it and 51 other “national labor, religious and civic groups” sponsored. In May that year, the AVC participated in a rally of over 14,000 at New York City’s Madison Square Garden to demand progress in civil rights and “to raise funds for carrying out other activities in this field.” The rally’s evening program featured radio and television star John Henry Falk, an AVC member and WWII veteran, who served as master of ceremonies, and AVC honorary member Eleanor Roosevelt.<sup>184</sup>

Aside from private sector meetings, the AVC also sought to ensure its affiliates full participation in governmental bodies set up to carry out civil rights mandates. For example, following and the creation of the national Civil Rights Commission (CRC) required by the 1957 Civil Rights Act, the AVC asked all members and local chapters to suggest names for service on the state level advisory committees that the Commission empowered as the voice of local communities on matters of joint concern. For its part, AVC headquarters set up a National Office of

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<sup>184</sup> *AVC Bulletin*, January, 1950, 1, and, *Ibid.*, January, 1952, 1; on the rallies, *Ibid.*, March, 1956, 1, and, *Ibid.*, May, 1956, 1. Falk’s career in radio and TV ended the following year after AWARE, Inc., a firm used by the advertising agencies to screen out alleged “subversives,” claimed he was a communist. Falk’s ordeal is covered in his own account of it, John Henry Falk, *Fear On Trial*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983) and in, Michael Burton, *John Henry Faulk: The Making of A Liberal Mind, A Biography*, (Austin, TX: Eakin Press, 1993).

Transmission to the Commission to ensure that suggested state committee nominees reached the CRC.<sup>185</sup>

As a matter of policy, the AVC practiced thorough racial integration. As executive director Lou Pakiser informed the NAACP's St. Louis branch in early 1950, "The AVC...is the only major veterans' organization that has insisted upon a completely democratic membership policy. We have no segregated chapters. We will not tolerate segregation in AVC." African-American veterans also held key leadership positions in the AVC. In January 1954, Robert A. Thompson, a charter member of the Atlanta (GA) chapter, joined the National Planning Committee (NPC), which along with the National Administrative Committee (NAC), comprised one of AVC's "two top governing bodies."

Columbia University Law School graduate Grant Reynolds served on both the NPC and NAC. His background included co-chairmanship of A. Philip Randolph's Committee Against Jim Crow in the Military, established by A. Philip Randolph, in early 1948, to encourage President Truman to desegregate the armed forces (with the threat of mass civil disobedience to the draft.) Paul Cooke, a professor at Washington, D.C.'s Minor Teachers College (a black college during segregation,) simultaneously served on the NPC and the National Executive Committee from 1953-1954; and in the late 1950s, he was a member of the National AVC Board and the National Affairs Commission chairman. In late April 1957, Chicago attorney William R. Ming's election as AVC's chairman, its highest post, made him "the first Negro to head a national veterans organization." As a top attorney with the NAACP's Legal Defense

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<sup>185</sup>*AVC Bulletin*, May, 1958, 1.

Fund, Ming argued numerous civil rights cases, including those involving school desegregation, before the U.S. Supreme Court.<sup>186</sup>

The notion that achieving full civil rights for African Americans was essential to provide the nation with the necessary strength to prevail against its Cold War adversaries permeated the AVC's rhetoric. As national chairman Curtis Campaigne told national convention delegates in 1953, "An America faithful to its own democratic tradition: no person shall enjoy less of liberty or opportunity than any other person." Furthermore, he stated, "In reaching our second goal AVC is effect establishing itself as a committee of the whole, --a sort of *American Activities Committee*. For as our platform states, 'Our strength as a world leader rests on our demonstration at home of the fact of Freedom.' This requires work to do away with all segregation and discrimination and at the same time to be alert to the danger of Soviet-inspired subversion." Similarly, in January 1954, AVC executive director Andrew Rice informed the Senate's Subcommittee on Civil Rights that, "The establishment of a permanent national commission on civil rights would shine a continuous spotlight on the remaining inequalities in a society which still denies some of the "inalienable rights" with which all men are endowed." Not creating the

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<sup>186</sup> Pakiser to Witherspoon, April 12, 1950, MS 2144, AVC Records, Ser. 9, Local Chapters, box 190, folder 10: Brooklyn, New York Chapter #31, 1950-1959, GL. As Pakiser also noted: "We have inter-racial Chapters in all parts of the United States, including Atlanta, Georgia; Tulsa, Oklahoma; Jackson, Mississippi; Austin, Texas and a number of other cities throughout the South." Ibid. When he came to the NPC, Thompson also served as Associate Secretary of the Atlanta Urban League, see *AVC Bulletin*, January, 1954, 2. Reynolds had also served as co-counsel of the Negro Labor Committee, was an ACLU activist, and president of the White Plains (NY) NAAC *AVC Bulletin*, February, 1955, 2, and Ibid., February, 1952, 1. Randolph's Committee Against Jim Crow in the Military was established in early 1948, to prod President Truman to desegregate the armed forces on the threat of mass civil disobedience to the draft. See Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 85. For Cooke's background, see his resume in MS 2144, AVC Records, ser. 7, subser. 2, box 155, folder 5 (file 2),: Cooke, Paul--Correspondence, 1955-1959, GL. Ming's WWII U.S. Army service took him from the rank of U.S. Army private to captain. In addition to law professorships at Howard University and the University of Chicago, Ming also served as Illinois Governor Adlai Stevenson's Assistant Attorney General. See *The Washington Post & Times Herald*, April, 28, 1957, B9.

commission, Rice warned, could imperil the nation in a final Armageddon-like showdown with the Soviets. “As veterans of three great wars against fascist and communist totalitarians, we want the darker-skinned peoples of the world—the majority of our planet’s population—to know we believe in equality. Else we may find them ranged against us in a final struggle which could leave no veterans of mankind at all.”<sup>187</sup>

The AVC’s executive director, Kenneth M. Birkhead, echoed this theme his July 1955 testimony to a House Judiciary Subcommittee in support of civil rights legislation. “As veterans we have also been deeply interested in the problems of stopping the aggressor nations and winning the peace. We have supported measures to achieve physical strength for our nation and the free world. This struggle requires more. The conflict with the Soviet Union is not carried on alone with guns and bombs and planes. It is also a moral struggle for the minds and loyalty of men. We give the skilled Russian propagandists another weapon when we fail to protect the rights of our own citizens.” While Birkhead linked internal civil rights reform to helping facilitate the nation’s national security goals, he also stressed reform’s essential role in fostering a strong and vibrant American nation. “More important even than this,” he told the committee, “is the fact that our nation and our people need this legislation. It is at the same time a moral problem and a social-political and economic problem. The passage of major civil rights legislation would be good for the American spirit, the American community, American education, the American

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<sup>187</sup> See Campaigne’s report to the 10<sup>th</sup> national convention in, *AVC Bulletin*, Dec, 1953, 6; for Rice’s comments, “Veterans Call for Civil Rights Legislation,” January 26, 1954, MS 2144, AVC Records, Series. 3, Official Statements, (hereinafter Ser. 3), Press Releases, box 79, folder 5: 1950-1954, GL.

political structure and American business.”<sup>188</sup> By implication, Birkhead’s insistence on the essential role of reform in reinvigorating the American nation meant that to oppose it would be an act of un-Americanism aiding the Soviets. Further, while framed as a national security issue, it also broadened the need for reform to include the need for addressing social and economic problems associated with racial inequality deemed essential to the nation’s health.

The group’s focus on employment discrimination similarly focused on the destructive effects of racial inequality on the American way of life by frustrating one of its most precious and foundational ideals: the belief that the individual was free to do better by working hard in an occupation of his own choosing. Failure to end racial bias in employment Birkhead noted, undercut individual faith in the workings of the nation’s entire economic system. “I think it is fair to say that the fundamental concept of American capitalism is that an individual may better his economic status to the extent that his abilities and energies empower him to do so... These principles of freedom and equality of opportunity have made our nation great. But as so long as any person is denied the right to compete on the basis of abilities without the arbitrary barrier of racial or religious discrimination, for so long is the American ideal not realized.” What all of this also implied, although it was unstated, was that if individuals could not believe in the American system of capitalism, they might be susceptible to embracing its alien other—Soviet collectivism. This thought may have, at least in part, informed Birkhead’s testimony when he told a House Judiciary panel

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<sup>188</sup> “Statement of Kenneth M. Birkhead, Executive Director, (AVC) Before the House Judiciary Subcommittee, No. 2 in support of civil rights legislation,” July 27, 1955, MS2144, AVC Records, Ser. 3, Testimonies, box 77, folder 3: 1955-1959, GL.

that “every employer should abide by the American principle of equal opportunity.”<sup>189</sup> Further, in an era in which comparisons of the superiority of American and Soviet economic systems became the material for high politics propaganda exchanges between Cold War rivals, such as the Nixon-Khrushchev kitchen debate at the 1959 Moscow trade show,<sup>190</sup> institutionalized economic inequality based on race that sullied the U.S. image, could potentially be utilized by the enemy.

Fighting job bias remained a primary focus of the AVC’s civil rights activism. In late 1951, the group’s NAC denounced the Truman Administration’s Committee on Government Compliance, set up to prevent racial discrimination in Korean War defense contracts as “excellent material for paving the torrid zone of the hereafter.” Unlike WWII’s Fair Employment Practices (FEPC), Truman’s Committee could review compliance procedures and recommend changes, but not enforce them. Even those recommendations the AVC noted were “subject to review by the Director of Defense Mobilization.” Although the AVC applauded the President’s “personal courage” in setting up the agency, it criticized ““the highly legalistic and timid endeavor’ of his staff to placate the racist minority in Congress.” To improve the situation, the AVC put its energies behind the fight for a national FEPC bill, modeled on the more potent WWII agency. In early 1950, it mobilized its national office resources and its state and local chapters to help end the Senate filibuster blocking passage of the bill. Battles also took place to establish state FEPC’s. The Salt Lake

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<sup>189</sup> Birkhead, “Before the House Judiciary Subcommittee, No. 2 in support of civil rights legislation,” July 27, 1955, *Ibid.*, GL

<sup>190</sup> On the Moscow Trade Show kitchen debate generally see, James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 317.

(UT) unit, that same year, remained the only veterans organization to join the state campaign. In July 1950, AVC units affiliated to the Pennsylvania Council for a State FEPC; and reported in January 1951 that they were “pushing the state’s FEPC organizing committee into what we hope will be a successful conclusion.” The group linked its fight for an effective FEPC to Cold War goals. As Harry Shugaar, AVC’s New York Civil Rights chairman, declared in the commemoration marking FEPC’s 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, held at FDR’s Hyde Park estate, on June 16, 1951: “The waste in skilled manpower that results from job discrimination is seriously undermining America’s defense effort.” When Shugaar, “pointed out that June 25 also marks the first anniversary of the Korean fighting,” he imposed additional patriotic meaning on the event. Also, when the national AVC, in October, 1951, called upon Truman “to quit stalling” on FEPC, it declared, “the creation of an FEPC is needed to show the world, ‘that we mean what we say when we talk about democracy.’”<sup>191</sup>

The AVC also vigilantly opposed racial discrimination in public sector employment. In April 1950, the group urged Congress to defeat a bill intended to block a February ruling by the Fair Employment Practices Board of the Civil Service Commission opening plate making apprenticeships to blacks employed at the Bureau of Printing and Engraving for the first time in the agency’s history. To maintain the

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<sup>191</sup> On the CGC’s problems and the call for an FDR-type FEPC, *AVC Bulletin*, December, 1951, 3; on national bill lobbying, *Ibid.*, May 1950, 2.; on Utah, *Ibid.*, December, 1950, 5.; on the DC Chapter, *Ibid.*, May, 1950, 4.; on the Pennsylvania FEPC Council., to which the VFW also joined, *Ibid.*, July, 1950, 4.; and, *Ibid.*, January, 1951, 8. For Shugaar’s remarks at Hyde Park, *AVC Bulletin*, June, 1951, 7; *Ibid.*, October, 1951, 8. Truman’s backtracking on FDR’s enforcement approach, by making FEPC an advisory body in 1945, followed by his late 1940s unwillingness to ruffle the Dixiecrat coalition in Congress by firmly pushing for a permanent commission, helped ensure that the issue persisted into the 1950s, see James B. Gilbert, *Another Chance, Postwar America 1945-1985*, (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1986), 18-19; and, see Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 144, 149-150. But as David Nichols has recently shown, Eisenhower’s August 1953 authorization of the President’s Committee on Government Contracts effectuated a federal level equivalent of an FEPC in actual practice, which won the NAACP’s praise, see Nichols, *A Matter of Justice*, 34-37.

whites-only hiring practices of the Bureau, the bill voided an apprenticeship examination mandated by the Commission, which many blacks, in this instance all WWII veterans, passed in March. As the AVC noted, the legislation, sponsored by segregationists Southern Democrats in the House and Senate, effectively closed off “printer plate-making apprentice jobs to Negro employees...who have already earned the right to these jobs through competitive examination.”<sup>192</sup> Although the House passed the bill May 1, 1950, the Senate declined to take it up. Finally, in late January 1951, the campaign to open plate-making jobs to blacks, begun three years earlier, ended victoriously when the Bureau appointed 35 black veterans to apprenticeships. But the AVC apparently had little, if any, influence on the outcome. The *Afro-American* in fact attributed the campaign’s success to its persistent in publicizing the case, and the agitation of the United Public Workers, the union representing the veterans, “which has spearheaded this fight.” Indeed, despite the ex-soldier status of the apprentices, the *Afro-American* listed the Elks, Council of Negro Churches in America, and the local (black) American Legion, among the organizations that supported the campaign, but not the AVC.<sup>193</sup>

At the state level, in some instances at least, well-positioned AVC members instituted fair hiring practices. In April 1955, for example, the *Bulletin* reported that Bergen County (NJ) chapter member D. Louis Tonti, as the state Highway Authority’s acting executive director, “has incorporated mandatory non-discrimination clauses in all Authority contracts.”<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> *AVC Bulletin*, May 1950, 4.

<sup>193</sup> The May 1 House action on the bill is in *AVC Bulletin*, May 1950, 4; *The Afro-American*, January 27, 1951, 12.

<sup>194</sup> *AVC Bulletin*, April, 1955, 3.

The AVC also fought job bias at Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) facilities in the South. In late summer, 1951, the AVC's Southern Region chapters publicized widespread racial discrimination by contractors at AEC sites at Oak Ridge, (TN), Paducah, (KY) and Ellenton, (SC). In these locations, the group maintained that the AEC "steadily refused" to mandate that a number of large northern corporations hire without color bars. Absent such restrictions, the Southern chapters noted, the firms freely, "adapted their employment practices to local prevailing racial customs." The AEC permitted segregated eating areas and the relegation of "virtually all" black construction workers to jobs as "unskilled laborers" at the Paducah and Ellenton plants. In a resolution denouncing these practices, the southern chapters drew upon the patriotic authority of their members' status as ex-soldiers and liberal Cold War Americanism rhetoric to depict the agency as unpatriotic and thoroughly hypocritical. "As veterans of World War II, joined together without regard to race, color or creed, we strongly protest these undemocratic practices...They are doubly reprehensible in federal operations which are designed to build weapons for the defense of the very democratic principles which are being violated." The national AVC reinforced these protests in letters to the AEC and President Truman, as the *Bulletin* reported, "demanding that the government adhere to American principles by abolishing discrimination and segregation in its plants."<sup>195</sup>

As the AVC argued, by producing atomic weapons the AEC advanced the country's Cold War defenses against potential Russian missile attacks. By permitting

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<sup>195</sup> *AVC Bulletin*, August-September, 1951, 1,5. For a social and labor history of the postwar Oakridge, TN plants, see Russell B. Olwell, *At Work in the Atomic City: A Labor and Social History of Oak Ridge, Tennessee*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2004).

segregation, however, the agency betrayed the nation by failing to uphold the principles for which the Cold War was being waged. By ending segregation, the AEC would both keep faith with the sacrifices made in the name of racial equality in the last war, and demonstrate its loyalty to the Cold War's democratic purpose.

But these arguments failed to overcome Congressional conservative opposition to the creation of a strong FDR-style FEPC. They also did not induce Presidents Truman or Eisenhower to provide their respective government contract committees, created to police discrimination by contractors on federal projects, with the kind of resources and strong enforcement powers they required to make substantial progress against employment discrimination possible. Instead, the authority both administrations granted to the contract committees paid deference to the power of segregationists and other conservatives in Congress. As historian Hugh Davis Graham has noted, "They were offered in response to a moral imperative, but they were designed to give minimal offense to a conservative-leaning Congress whose memories of Roosevelt's FEPC conjured up dark images of Reconstruction."<sup>196</sup> Thus, despite the commitment made by AEC director Fletcher Waller to black civil rights advocates in September 1951 that he would "make a sincere effort to 'improve'" employment practices; in October, 1953, NAACP officials found that major chemical firms at the agency's Aiken, (SC) and Paducah,

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<sup>196</sup> For discussion of Truman's Committee on Government Contract Compliance and Eisenhower's Committee on Government Contracts and the politics that shaped their lack of enforcement powers, and hence their ineffectiveness, see Hugh Davis Graham, *The Civil Rights Era: Origins and Development of National Policy, 1960-1972* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 14-18. For Graham's quote, *Ibid.*, 16.

(KY) sites “used and trained large numbers of white workers, ‘but consistently give the run around to colored [workers] seeking similar jobs.’”<sup>197</sup>

The AVC also attacked one of the major continuing stumbling blocks to civil rights reform, the use of Senate Rule 22, which permitted die-hard segregationists among Southern Democrats to endlessly filibuster reform bills unless two-thirds of the full Senate, not just those Senators who happened to be in the chamber at a given time, voted cloture to end debate and permit a vote. While giving due respect to the Constitution’s concerns for protecting minority viewpoints, the AVC’s arguments for Rule 22 reform used liberal Americanism to characterize Dixiecrat filibustering as not only un-democratic, but also, as an unpatriotic impediment undermining Cold War national defense priorities. As then national chairman Michael Straight testified in October 1951, in support of New York Senator Herbert Lehman’s cloture revision bill, “it is desirable that any cloture rule contain a guarantee protecting the right of thorough debate. We don’t want to see legislation ‘railroaded’ through the Senate.” But he added, “a majority has a right to act, and after assuring the minority its ‘day in court,’ to close debate and proceed to a vote... We are tired of seeing a determined minority repeatedly frustrate the will of the majority to expand our American freedoms and serve the general welfare.” Further, Straight declared, “In the present emergency, when at any time we may be confronted with new acts of communist aggression, the Senate must be able to act speedily on measures essential to national security. Senators dedicated to the extension of equal rights to all Americans—and they are a majority of Senators—have long sought the enactment of President Truman’s Civil Rights Program... They must think twice, however, before bringing

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<sup>197</sup> *The Afro-American*, September 8, 1951, 1; *New York Times*, October 12, , 1951, 27.

these proposals to the floor of the Senate, in the knowledge that the filibuster they touch off cannot, under the present rule, be stopped by cloture and that their efforts to make American democracy a reality for all Americans may delay or prevent the enactment of necessary security measures.”<sup>198</sup>

Yet the group’s contention that Rule 22 simultaneously undermined American democracy and Cold War national security interests failed to generate support for reform. Unable to gain sufficient Senate backing to achieve their goal, the AVC and its liberal allies continued work for change, but reform eluded them for the remainder of the decade. In 1957, the AVC praised its chapters in California for conducting a “Letters to the Editors” campaign “to arouse public understanding of the issue.” Also in November 1958, a coalition of the AVC and 16 other liberal organizations, including the NAACP, ADA, and the ACLU, advocated adoption of a majority cloture rule, and asked Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson “not to accept any ‘spurious compromises’ to limit debate in the Senate.” But, in January 1959, “compromise” rule change Johnson engineered, allowing two-thirds of those senators present to vote cloture, ensured him large Southern support and, consequently, the defeat of the majority rule proposal liberals endorsed. As the *Afro-American* characterized the outcome, “no substantial change has been made in Senate Rule 22, which throws an arm of protection around the filibuster.” The election of 1960

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<sup>198</sup> “Statement of Michael Straight, National Chairman, AVC, On Resolutions to Amend the Cloture Rule Before the Senate Rules Committee,” October 2, 1951, MS 2144, AVC Records, Ser. 3, Testimonies, box 77, folder 2: 1950-1954, GL. At this same hearing, NAACP Executive Secretary, and AVC ally, Walter White also invoked Cold War language. In referring to recent Soviet obstructionism at the Japan peace treaty conference, White observed that the Russians “utilized every one of the techniques of delay which had been perfected on the floor of the United States Senate.” Further, he declared, “We challenge any logical man to differentiate between Gromyko and [Mississippi Senator James O.] Eastland on this issue of filibuster.” *Washington Post & Times Herald*, October 3, 1951, 2.

reinforced the status quo, since both President Kennedy and Vice-President Johnson refused to expose their legislative agendas to likely attacks by segregationists by supporting further changes to Rule 22.<sup>199</sup> As the fate of the Rule 22 campaign demonstrates, calculations of raw power politics, rather than Cold War rhetoric, determined the course of domestic civil rights reform in these years.

The AVC also worked to advance racial equality in housing. For example, in 1953, the AVC filed an amicus brief in the Supreme Court case *Barrows v. Jackson*, which confronted the issue of whether persons who had contractually agreed to the terms of a restrictive covenant, could be held liable for monetary damages for breaking its conditions by selling their property “to persons in the proscribed classes.” If the Court ruled that the parties could be held liable for breaking the covenant contract, it would serve to undo its 1948 covenant decisions, which held that courts could not use their authority to enforce the discrimination such restrictive contracts required. Framing the issues at stake within liberal Americanism, the AVC declared, “The Court now has another opportunity to hammer home several points about American democracy and genuine freedoms.” In concluding its statement on *Barrows*, the group declared, “We in the [AVC] are interested in this case because the very formation of our nation-wide organization during World War II was based on

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<sup>199</sup>AVC *Bulletin*, January, 1957, 1; *Washington Post & Times Herald*, November, 20, 1958, A19; see the editorial “Silent Executioner;” AVC *Bulletin*, November, 1958, 2; “AVC Demands Liberal Revision Senate Rule XXII to Curb Filibuster, January 5, 1959” MS 2144, Ser. 3, Press Releases, box 79, folder 6:1955-1959, GL; on passage of Johnson’s “compromise,” Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising, Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1908-1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 547; *The Afro-American*, January 24, 1959, 4; the positions of Kennedy and Johnson on Rule 22 are in, Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant, Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961-1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 31. A Senate rule adopted in 1975 permits cloture by three-fifths of the full chamber (or 60 of 100 Senators) versus the two-thirds previously required. See Gregory J. Wawro and Eric Shickler, *Filibuster: Obstruction and Lawmaking in the U.S. Senate*, (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 266-267.

the desire to continue our fight in peacetime for our finest democratic beliefs and institutions, while continuing our fight against the undemocratic and un-American attitudes that one particular race or skin pigmentation group is superior to all others.” In March 1955, *AVC Bulletin* termed segregated housing, “our greatest civil rights challenge in America today,” and excoriated the discriminatory housing loan policies of Veterans Administration and Federal Housing Authority that resulted in “government-financed ‘ghettos’.” It also labeled the FHA’s home loan practices, “the ‘Typhoid Mary’ of segregated housing.” Later in 1957, the AVC publicly commended Vice-President Richard Nixon, Senator Estes Kefauver and Oscar Chapman “for opposing the restrictive covenants pertaining to their neighborhoods” in Washington, D.C.<sup>200</sup>

The AVC’s fair housing activism in New York was considerable. In late 1956, AVC member James Sheuer, chairman of the Housing Advisory Council of the State Commission against Housing Discrimination, won the Walter White Award for promoting fair housing practices in New York’s real estate industry. The AVC’s efforts to obtain fair housing in New York often focused attention on Cold War concerns. As AVC’s national vice-chairman Shanley N. Egeth told the New York City Council, in June 1957, its vote on the state bill to halt race discrimination in

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<sup>200</sup> On *Barrows v. Jackson* see *AVC Bulletin*, May, 1953, 3; and, “[AVC] National Chairman Curtis Campaigne, Jr. commenting on the case of *Barrows v. Jackson* argued this week in the United States Supreme Court.” May 1, 1953, MS 2144, Ser. 3, Press Releases, box 79, folder 5: 1950-1954; in *Barrows*, the Court ruled that judicial enforcement of racially restrictive covenants entailed unconstitutional state action to discriminate against blacks, Kermit Hall, James W. Ely and Joel B. Grossman, eds. *The Oxford Companion to the Supreme Court of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 814; See editorial, “Housing: The Last Stronghold of Segregation,” *AVC Bulletin*, March, 1955, 2; on Nixon, et al, see “Vice-President [Nixon], Senator Kefauver, Oscar Chapman Commended for Restrictive Covenant Position,” February 6, 1957, MS 2144, AVC Records, Ser. 3, Press Releases, box 79, folder 6: 1955-1959, GL.

rental apartments and homes sales entailed far-reaching repercussions on the country's Cold War image at home and abroad. "The decision...will be followed carefully," he noted, not only by New Yorkers, "but...by people in other sections of this country [the South]... and also throughout the world." To prove his point, Egeth held up the front page of the *Burma Star*, featuring the federal court reinstatement of African-American Authorine Lucy at the University of Alabama, Birmingham (previously published in the *Bulletin*), "demonstrating the enormous interests in the Far East of race relations in this country." AVC's New York Regional Council buttressed Egeth's message in a resolution it passed, in mid-September 1957, asking New York City politicians for bi-partisan support of the bill. "Passage of this legislation affords...a unique opportunity...to refute charges of hypocrisy leveled by the segregationists of the South and by their action demonstrate to the entire world that people of our city, regardless of race and color can and will live side by side as good neighbors." The issue warranted such unity, they observed, because "the whole question of integration is too vital to the well-being of the nation to be used for political gain."<sup>201</sup>

The group also targeted its protests against segregationist homebuilders. In June 1958, the AVC's New Jersey State Council denounced William J. Levitt's "white [only] occupancy policy" for his new Levittown project in their state as "morally wrong" and as "part of the segregation issue which aids the Communists"

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<sup>201</sup> *AVC Bulletin*, December, 1956, 4; for Egeth's testimony, *AVC Bulletin*, June, 1957, 4; for the *Burma Star* article in *AVC Bulletin*, see, *Ibid.*, March, 1956, 2; on the AVC New York Region's resolution, see its press release, "AVC Calls For Bi-Partisan Endorsement of Housing Measure," and the attached "Resolution on Sharkey-Brown- Isaacs Bill adopted by the New York Regional Council, AVC," September 16, 1957, MS 2144, AVC Records, Series, 1, Subjects, Subseries 2, Civil Rights (hereinafter, Ser. 1, Subser. 2), box 24, folder 10: Racial Discrimination in Housing, 1951-1966.

advances in the non-white areas of the world.” The Council found Levitt’s latest project especially reprehensible since, “many of the Negro families barred by him are headed by veterans, some of whom shed blood.” As the Council concluded, Levitt’s discriminatory policies “handicapped the fight against international communism.”<sup>202</sup>

In the AVC’s argument, racial segregation in housing provided ready fodder for the enemy always seeking to exploit the gap between the ideal and the reality of American democracy. While the Levittown projects stood as America’s new symbols of mass production abundance and economic superiority over Soviet collectivism, they effaced the democracy their veteran residents fought and died for by denying their African-American brothers in arms equal access to them. By potentially handing the Soviets a propaganda victory, Levittown betrayed the country’s soldier-veterans, and in the process the nation at large. The “un-American” racial restrictions of Levittown tossed aside as meaningless, the patriotic wartime sacrifices of all veterans. Inasmuch as the new federally subsidized suburbia projected the image of a broadly distributed economic national security envisioned by New Deal reformist policies, racial discrimination in Levittown subverted postwar nationhood and weakened Cold War unity.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> For AVC’s protest against Levitt, *AVC Bulletin*, June, 1958, 1.

<sup>203</sup> On the New Deal liberalism’s understanding of more egalitarian economic and social reforms as the basis for national security generally, see Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 238-239; and, on the centrality of expanded homeownership in particular to FDR’s notion of national security, see Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 60. For a discussion of the use of representations of the suburban domestic ideal in building postwar nationalism, as it was depicted in popular magazine photography, see “The Kind of People Who make Good Americans: Nationalism and *Life*’s Family Ideal,” Chapter 3 in, Wendy Kozol, *Life’s America: Family and Nation in Postwar Photojournalism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), esp., 54-56, 73-74.

Nevertheless, the New Jersey Levittown case underscores the ineffectiveness of liberal Cold War rhetoric in advancing non-discriminatory housing policy in this period. After Levitt announced his intention to sell homes at the sprawling Burlington County site exclusively to white buyers in June 1958, New Jersey officials moved quickly to block his plan by invoking a recently enacted 1957 housing law prohibiting racial discrimination in federally financed housing. In late July 1958 the New Jersey Division Against Discrimination secured an agreement with the Veterans Administration that it would help the state enforce its housing law by withholding VA mortgage funding from discriminatory home builders. Levitt filed a suit in December 1958 to overturn the state law; but in late February 1960, the New Jersey Supreme Court sustained lower court rulings requiring him to make VA and FHA subsidized homes available to black buyers. In June 1960, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to review the case. In July 1960, as the *Afro-American* reported, Levitt & Sons, Inc. “announced that two colored families are purchasing homes in the firm’s hitherto lily-white 16,000 unit development.” Levitt’s defeat in the courts, as the *Afro-American* observed in August 1959 (shortly after the state Appeals Court had ruled against him), resulted from New Jersey having “one of the strongest laws against racial discrimination in the country.”<sup>204</sup> In short, as the outcome of this case revealed, it was the presence of an effective law and its enforcement, rather than Cold War reform rhetoric that helped curb the discriminatory practices of one the nation’s largest homebuilders. Indeed, states that lacked anti-discrimination laws, Levitt

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<sup>204</sup> Some facts of the case are in Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 217; the text of the 1957 Housing Act is in *The Afro-American*, August 1, 1959, 4; *Ibid.*, July 19, 1958, 19; *Ibid.*, December 20, 1958, 6; *Ibid.*, February 20, 1960, 5; *Ibid.*, June 23, 1960, 8; *Ibid.*, July 9, 1960, 1; *Ibid.*, August 1, 1959, 4.

followed local patterns of segregation as a matter of company policy and kept his developments closed to blacks. Thus, through the mid-1960s, in the absence of a housing law banning discrimination, Levitt refused to heed the demands of the AVC and a coalition of civil rights organizations led by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), to integrate his Belair, Maryland development.<sup>205</sup>

The AVC also devoted considerable energy to the problem of Jim Crow in the military. Segregation among U.S. military forces remained a major issue well into the mid-1950s. In large measure the problem originated with Truman's July 26, 1948 Executive Order 9981. The order mandated "equality of treatment and opportunity in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin," but it lacked a clear timetable, other than ordering compliance as soon as possible consistent with the maintenance of "efficiency or morale." Further, many in the military's command structure did not want to desegregate.<sup>206</sup> When the AVC's National Planning Committee took up the issue at its January 13, 1951 Minneapolis (MN) meeting, it reported that while the Air Force and Navy had desegregated, the Army remained recalcitrant. Frustrated and incensed by the situation, the NPC sent President Truman a forceful resolution that called upon him to order the Army's

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<sup>205</sup> As William Levitt told a press conference following his testimony to the President's Committee on Equal Opportunity in Housing in August 1963: "The policy of the Levitt firm has been to obey the law or 'follow local custom.'" *Washington Post & Times Herald* August 15, 1963, B1. The AVC made segregation at Levitt's Belair, MD development the focal point of appeals to President Kennedy that he (and other administration officials) act to end discriminatory housing, see, *The Afro-American*, July 22, 1961, 16; *Ibid.*, January 13, 1962, 16. For the protests of civil rights organizations, led by CORE, directed at the Belair development, see for example, *The Afro-American*, August 24, 1963, 13; and, *New York Times*, November 14, 1963, 14. On Levitt's continued refusal to integrate Belair see, *Washington Post & Times Herald* August 15, 1963, B1, and, *The Afro-American*, May 28, 1966, 4. Levitt told the House Judiciary Committee, in late May 1966, that he sold home to whites only at Belair because "that state has no anti-discrimination housing law," and did so to remain competitive with other discriminatory builders. He also stated he was willing to abandon segregation if a strong federal housing open housing law eliminated competition. *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>206</sup> For the terms of E.O. #9981, and the military's resistance to desegregation, see Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 86.

immediate compliance with his September 30, 1949 directive requiring racial integration of the armed services, “at home and abroad.” Furthermore, the group declared, should the Army not comply, “we respectfully suggest that all responsible officers including the Chief of Staff...be court-marshaled for violation of the Articles of War, as have been other officers and enlisted men where their derelictions were neither so gross nor so damaging to the military establishment of the United States.” It justified its appeal in terms of Cold War priorities, noting, “The actions we have suggested would serve effectively, we believe, to weld the national unity without which we cannot meet the present crisis.” In addition, the group pledged “an all-out effort” to achieve the Army’s full desegregation, which included, “the widest possible publicity,” and its “continued cooperation with the [NAACP] at the national and chapter levels.”<sup>207</sup>

In this same resolution, the AVC protested the re-segregation of Minnesota National Guard inductees by the Army, which the state’s NAACP officers reported to the meeting. These officials brought proof of the practice whereby the Army’s inductee stations kept separate induction lists to route previously integrated black guardsmen, bound for duty at the Korean battlefield and elsewhere, into segregated units. As the *Bulletin* reported, the black guardsmen, “after reaching Fort Riley, were detached from their white unit mates, and were assigned to Fort Rucker, Alabama, where they were placed in an all-Negro battalion. This battalion did not have proper clothing (50% lacked field jackets and 75% lacked overcoats) while white units, training in a separate section of the camp, were well equipped.” In addition, the camp

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<sup>207</sup> On the Army’s recalcitrance and the NPC’s resolution, *AVC Bulletin*, January, 1951, 7.

provided blacks with substandard recreational and post-exchange facilities, and ordered them “to long tours of duty without relief.”<sup>208</sup>

On March 1, 1951, the AVC’s national chairman Michael Straight, Minnesota Senator Hubert H. Humphrey and NAACP leaders met jointly with U.S. Army Chief of Staff General Lawton Collins, whose office wielded direct responsibility for implementing Truman’s E.O. #9981, to push for complete desegregation of the Army. General Collins assured the group, in Straight’s words, that the Army “was moving forward as fast as possible to end segregation.” But in an answer to a question from Straight on the meaning of E.O. 9981’s clause requiring “equal treatment,” General Collins “replied that he did not think the order demanded an end to segregation, but merely held it as an ultimate goal.” In subsequent months, Humphrey and other Senate liberals persisted in pushing reform in meetings with the Defense Department. Finally, on July 26, the Army agreed to desegregate the Far Eastern Command, or 8<sup>th</sup> Army units, in Japan and Korea. This breakthrough came after Senators Humphrey and Lehman appealed to Defense Secretary Marshall, “asking him to strongly support moves toward ending Army segregation.” Significantly, they sent their letter on June 25, “the anniversary of the Korean communist aggression.” On July 20, Marshall informed the Senators of the Army’s forthcoming desegregation order.<sup>209</sup>

But the AVC’s Cold War Americanism arguments proved to be inconsequential to the integration of the Far Eastern Command. Instead, military necessity forced de-facto integration well ahead of the Army’s July 26 order. As the *Baltimore Sun* reported, “The end of segregation was speeded in Korea last year by

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<sup>208</sup> *AVC Bulletin*, January, 1951, 1, and see the editorial, “No More Jim Crow,” *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>209</sup> *AVC Bulletin*, August-September, 1951, 8

the critical need at the front for every man who could fire a gun against the Chinese Communist.”<sup>210</sup> Reports from field commanders concerning the battlefield advantages of de-facto integration in Korea also propelled the change in policy. As Army officials in Washington, D.C. subsequently informed the press, “Combat experience in Korea...has demonstrated that ‘Negro soldiers serve more efficiently in integrated units.’”<sup>211</sup>

Despite such progress, segregation in the Army persisted elsewhere overseas and in home front units. As the *Bulletin* reported in late summer, 1951, “Basic training camps are generally integrated now, but most organized units are still set up on a Jim Crow basis.”<sup>212</sup> In late September, the NPC wrote Gen. Collins to applaud the desegregation of the Far East Command, while calling for immediate follow-up in Europe and the United States. Answering for Collins, Lt. General A.C. McAuliffe, limited discussion to the need for further analysis of the problem. As McAuliffe reported, “[S]tudy is continuing... In this regard, it is evident that integration in areas other than the Far East Command, particularly in the United States, will present problems of greater magnitude and variety than those encountered in Korea and Japan.” Straight rejected McAuliffe’s assessment. As he declared, “the pattern of non-segregation over most of the United States is as deep and should be far more important in determining the attitudes of the military than the dying pattern of segregation in sixteen Southern states.” Straight also pointed to the desegregation

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<sup>210</sup> *Baltimore Sun*, July 27, 1951, 1. Also, as historian Andrew H. Myers noted, “Battlefield commanders became so desperate for men that they began using South Koreans as fillers in American units.” See *Andrew H. Meyers, Black, White & Olive Drab: Racial Integration at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 84.

<sup>211</sup> *Washington Post & Times Herald*, July 27, 1951, 1. The *Post* also noted that the Army’s July 26 integration order marked the 3<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of President Truman’s E.O. #9981, *Ibid.*

<sup>212</sup> *AVC Bulletin*, August-September, 1951, 8.

record of the Navy and Air Force, along with that of civilian organizations and institutions, including labor unions and universities, as indicators that the Army could follow suit in the U.S. His last point, however, struck at the un-American nature of the Army's policy. As Straight declared, "it is a mockery of democracy that colored and white soldiers who are fighting together in Korea should be kept apart here at home."<sup>213</sup>

As David Nichols has recently revealed, President Eisenhower exceeded the Truman record in desegregating the armed forces. In late October 1954, Defense Secretary Charles E. Wilson, as Nichols notes, "formally announced that the last racially segregated unit in the armed forces had been abolished." But Nichols acknowledges that "residual problems" remained. The AVC continued to press for reform in these areas, particularly in the southern states, and including segregation in the National Guard. Yet segregation also existed in northern guard units. In December 1951, for example, the Massachusetts AVC conferred its Freedom Award on State Assembly representative Harold Putnam, "for his fight to end segregation in the National Guard." Throughout 1955, the AVC's Baltimore chapter pressured Maryland officials to put a halt to segregation in the state's National Guard units. When Maryland Governor Theodore McKeldin abolished Guard segregation in late November that year, Frank Inglehart, chair of the AVC's Veterans and Armed Services Commission, wrote him, "expressing AVC's complete support and

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<sup>213</sup>*AVC Bulletin*, August-September, 1951, 8. For the subsequent exchanges with Lt. Gen. McAuliffe, see *AVC Bulletin*, November, 1951, 1; and Lt. Gen. A.C. McAuliffe, GSC, Assistant Chief of Staff, G-1, Personnel, Department of the Army, Washington, DC to Mr. Michael Straight, October 5, 1951, MS 2144, AVC Records, Ser. 7, Subseries 1, General Correspondence, box 150, folder 6, (file 2): General AVC Correspondence, 1945-1961, GL; Michael Straight, AVC National Chairman, to Lt. Gen. A. C. McAuliffe, GSC, Assistant Chief of Staff, G-1, Department of the Army, Washington DC, November 9, 1951, *Ibid.*, GL.

congratulations for the action he has taken in Maryland.” Inglehart, and AVC executive director Kenneth Birkhead, also sent a statement to 12 southern governors calling upon them to follow McKeldin’s lead. “Governor McKeldin has desegregated the Maryland National Guard. We urge you also [to] strike a blow for democracy and honor those who serve their nation by taking similar action.” At its 9<sup>th</sup> national convention, in November 1955, the AVC also called for an anti-segregation amendment to the armed forces reserve bill, an end to segregation “in any federally aided National Guard units,” and from Congress or the Defense Department, “a report regarding the efficiency of such non-segregated units.”<sup>214</sup>

As always, in lobbying for its reserve bill amendment, the group framed reform as a matter of national security and a rebuff to Soviet propaganda efforts. As it informed House Armed Services Committee chairman Carl Vinson, in late June 1955, “No group is more concerned about the security of this nation than AVC, whose members have fought in three wars against totalitarianism in all forms. But it would be a ‘false security’ indeed to enact a reserve program which would weaken our

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<sup>214</sup> Nichols, *A Matter of Justice*, 43, 48. Nichols notes ( 43) that Eisenhower’s record of achievements in armed forces desegregation, “was done in the Eisenhower style, without press releases, focused on quiet negotiations with leading military officers.” On Putnam’s Freedom Award, *AVC Bulletin*, December 1951, 4; on McKeldin’s desegregation of the guard, and the AVC’s statement to the 12 southern governors, *AVC Bulletin*, December, 1955 3, and “Desegregation in the National Guard,” November 22, 1955, MS 2144, AVC Records, Ser. 3, Press Releases, box 79, folder 6: 1955-1959, GL. The 12 southern states receiving AVC’s desegregation call were Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma; South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Louisiana, and Virginia. Ibid. The 9<sup>th</sup> AVC National Convention resolution is quoted in the November 22, 1955 AVC press release, Ibid., GL. Nichols notes that the President came up short on reforming the National Guard. “Eisenhower, compromising his position that federal money should never be spent to support discrimination, hesitated to confront the governors on this issue.” Nichols, *A Matter of Justice*, 49. Previously, in early 1952, the AVC had given much praise to Governor McKeldin’s pro-integration statements as they related to civilian segregation practices in Washington DC and Baltimore, in a full length article in the *AVC Bulletin*, January, 1952, 4. In July 1955, Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. thanked AVC for its support of his efforts in the House to end National Guard segregation. As Powell told the group, “Despite tremendous intimidation, backed by people such as you, I will not retreat one inch.” See Powell’s letter in, *AVC Bulletin*, July-August, 1955, 2.

fighting forces and handicap our position as the leader of the free world. Why give the Communists another weapon in their ideological warfare? In its present form, the reserve bill, H.R. 7000, uncommitted to a disavowal of segregation, would be the most vulnerable link in our security.”<sup>215</sup> The AVC’s national chairman Mickey Levine likewise denounced the refusal of Iceland and the Arab countries to, respectively, allow the stationing of black and Jewish servicemen. As Levine informed Secretary of State Herter in December 1959, “These policies place the United States in the ridiculous position of posing as the defender of democracy throughout the world, while at the same time bowing in abject humiliation before any government which does not like Catholics, Jews, Negroes, or any other minority groups.” “Frankly,” Levine stated, “we wonder how we can expect the peoples of the world to respect American democracy if we accept such discriminatory rejections of American soldiers.”<sup>216</sup>

The AVC’s Cold War arguments, however, proved ineffective in bringing about reform of the National Guard in the South. In June 1961, the AVC’s national convention reported that in ten Southern states “not a single colored citizen serves in the National Guard.” The convention also urged President Kennedy to “correct these conditions...without further delay.”<sup>217</sup> Although states exercised primary authority over the National Guard, the President possessed substantial leverage to press for

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<sup>215</sup> “AVC Urges Anti-Segregation Amendment to Reserve Bill in Best Interests of National Security,” June 29, 1955, MS 2144, AVC Records, Ser. 3, Press Releases, box 79, folder 6: 1955-1959, GL.

<sup>216</sup> Levine’s letter to Herter is in, *AVC Bulletin*, January, 1960, 4; for the AVC’s previous protest to Secretary of State Gates, see Mickey Levine, National Chairman to The Secretary of State, Dept. of State Washington, DC, December 8, 1959, attachment to press release, “AVC Condemns Overseas Troop Assignment Policies Based on Religion or Race,” MS 2144, AVC Records, Ser. 3, Press Releases, box 79, folder 6: 1955-1959. *The Afro-American* also carried the full story of the AVC’s protest. *The Afro American*, December 19, 1959, 1,6.

<sup>217</sup> *The Afro-American*, June 17, 1961, 4.

integration, since more than ninety-five percent of its funding in the early 1960s came from the federal government.<sup>218</sup> Yet, in keeping with Eisenhower's policy, the Kennedy Administration remained unwilling to challenge Southern governors over segregation in the National Guard by withholding federal funds. As the Department of Defense (DOD) announced in July 1963, "The department is seeking to have bars dropped voluntarily." Consequently, the DOD reported, while "Progress has been achieved in that practically all of the colored units have now been eliminated throughout the [Northern] National Guard...[t]he principal problem remaining is with regard to ten of the Southern states which do not yet have colored people in their National Guard units."<sup>219</sup> President Johnson continued this approach. As the *Washington Post* observed in late December 1964, while the President's Committee on Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces informed him "that considerable vestiges of discrimination exists in branches of the National Guard...Johnson indicated that he would prefer to rely on voluntary means to integrate National Guard units in the South."<sup>220</sup> In short, the unwillingness of successive presidential administrations to wield federal power to force integration of Southern Guard units neutralized the reform potential of Cold War discourse.

The AVC also took up the problem of segregation and racial inequality in the administration of veterans' benefits. In October 1953, when the group attacked segregation at Veterans Administration hospitals, national chairman Curtis Campaigne told the agency's administrator Harvey Higley that, "It is hard to

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<sup>218</sup> *The Afro-American*, October 7, 1961, 9.

<sup>219</sup> On Eisenhower's failure to withhold federal funding to reform the National Guard, see Nichols, *Matter of Justice*, 49; *Washington Post & Times Herald*, July 6, 1963, 12.

<sup>220</sup> *Washington Post & Times Herald*, December 30, 1964, A18.

understand why men who fought and were wounded side by side on the battlefield now must be separated.” Over time, the AVC found Higley to be a friendly ally in carrying out the Eisenhower Administration’s pro-civil rights mandates. As Higley informed AVC, “Please know that I am in complete accord with the policy of the President to eliminate segregation in federal institutions.” “The Veterans Administration,” he noted, “is taking a lead in this direction and moving toward this end as rapidly as practicable.” Higley received Eisenhower’s praise in October 1954, after he reported in September that he had completed the VA’s racial integration about a year after initiating the process. But when the government transferred authority over military hospitals to segregated states, such progress ended. This became clear to the AVC, in late 1959, when it sought the Army’s intervention to ensure that the Army-Navy Hospital in Hot Springs Arkansas would continue to adhere federal mandates preventing segregation in its operations, including job assignments, after its transfer to state control. In September, the group’s National Affairs Commission chairman Michael Cooke wrote the Army requesting the inclusion of a clause in the hospital’s transfer deed prohibiting re-segregation. But the defeat of H.R. 6190 in Congress, which provided for a nondiscrimination rule in the property deed, led the Army’s General Counsel to inform Cooke that, “Congress itself has acted upon and rejected this precise proposal and the Secretary of the Army would not be justified in disregarding this action by Congress.”<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> For AVC’s exchanges with VA Higley see *AVC Bulletin*, October, 1953, 3. Nichols provides only a very brief discussion of desegregation in VA’s and other military hospital facilities and highlights Higley’s record of progress, see Nichols, *A Matter of Justice*, 46. On the Army-Navy Hospital at Hot Springs (AR) see, Frank G. Millard, General Counsel, Dept. of the Army, Washington DC to Paul Cooke, Chairman, National Affairs Commission, AVC, October 2, 1959, MS 2144, AVC Records, Ser. 7, Subser. 2, box 155, Folder 6: “Cooke, Paul—Correspondence, 1955-1959, GL; and *AVC Bulletin*, October, 1959, 1.

National chairman Levine's early 1956 first-hand investigation of the administration of veterans' benefits in the South also dispelled Higley's optimistic 1954 report to Eisenhower. In mid-March, the AVC released the results of Levine's survey it sent to Congressmen Teague's House Veterans Affairs Committee. "We are failing miserably the hundreds of thousands of Negro veterans...mainly because of the attitude of those in the South who are able to contravene the purposes of the GI Bill of Rights and other veterans programs." Levine's report did not paint a completely dire picture. For example, the survey found it, "encouraging ...that VA hospitals have gradually become integrated and that progress is being made. However, there is much to be done." The survey revealed ongoing problems with segregation. "In Memphis," he noted, "I was told that the hospitals there are allegedly non-segregated. The VA Hospital in Montgomery has also likewise begun to integrate but nevertheless, when there is a question of admitting a Negro veteran strong efforts are made to divert him to Tuskegee which is overwhelmingly Negro in composition."<sup>222</sup>

Levine's report on veteran's hospitals built upon the group's February 1956 report known as the "veterans audit," which buttressed his findings, and revealed, for example, that at the New Orleans (LS) VA hospital, "segregation existed in the wards and the dining halls." In the Columbia (SC) VA facility a mixed picture emerged.

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<sup>222</sup> For the full text of Levine's survey, see "Mickey Levine's Report on Trip Through the South," n.d., MS 2144, AVC Records, Ser. 1, Subjects, Subser. 2, Civil Rights, folder 8: Black Veterans in the South, 1955-1958, GL. Levine's survey covered Tennessee, Arkansas, Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi, Ibid. "Vet Leader Charges Negro Veteran in South, 'Has Been Denied His Rights, As An Ex-Serviceman'" MS 2144, ser. 3, March 15, 1956; and, *AVC Bulletin*, March, 1956, 1; additional coverage of the survey is in: *Washington Post & Times Herald*, March 16, 1956, 31. Also, Levine's report received praise in *The Chicago Defender*; but the paper was skeptical that Teague's Veterans Affairs Committee would act in the absence of support from other veterans' organizations. See the "Watch on the Potomac" column, *The Chicago Defender* (Daily Edition), March 22, 1956, 4.

“Segregation was found at the hospital here in several wards, although other wards and the cafeteria were integrated.” Further, in Atlanta’s VA hospitals, the audit found, the medical director mandated that staff “in all installations,” utilize race data in the delivery of health care services to patients, as his instructions stated, ““where it has a bearing on the treatment or would facilitate service to the veteran’.” “Another recurring and disquieting complaint,” the audit noted, “is the equalization of facilities by their elimination. This occurs frequently in the field of recreation particularly with regard to the use of swimming pools. When integration is ordered in the use of these facilities, some excuse is often found for discontinuing them.” Despite official VA mandates, then, the AVC’s investigations showed that for the sake of upholding segregation, black veterans were systematically being denied equal services and facilities, which by law, they had earned.<sup>223</sup>

In practice, Levine’s survey also found that blacks faced limited access to GI Bill of Rights education benefits, due in large part to severe restrictions segregation placed on available schools. “In Montgomery, [Alabama],” he reported, “where conditions are better than in rural areas, there is no professional school, or... mechanical training school for Negroes. Mississippi’s African-American veterans apparently fared the worst. Likewise, he reported, “In Mississippi, I was told by Negro veteran leaders that the educational rights have been utilized by those that are the most aggressive and the luckiest. The great mass of Negro veterans have not been

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<sup>223</sup> “First Annual Veterans Audit of the American Veterans Committee,” MS 2144, AVC Records, Ser. 1, Subjects, Subser. 2, Civil Rights, box 22, folder 7: First Annual Audit of the AVC, 1956, GL. The AVC made the Audit report public on February 21, 1956, see press release “AVC Conducts First Annual Veterans Audit,” MS 2144, Ibid, Ser. 3, Press Releases, box 79, folder 6: 1955-1959, GL.

able to make use of the educational benefits of the GI bill.”<sup>224</sup> Pervasive racial bias in southern banking also meant that black veterans faced denial of their rights to GI bill home and farm loan programs. Growing white resistance to the civil rights upsurge reinforced existing discriminatory practices. As Levine noted, in Mississippi “the locals bankers, many of whom are members of the White Citizens Councils, threatened not only those who made applications but those whose businesses are mortgaged with economic reprisals if they signed integration petitions.” Levine found only Atlanta (GA) stood out as a beacon of limited progress due to the creation of “Negro Federal Savings and Loans Associations” there.<sup>225</sup>

African-Americans also confronted major difficulties in utilizing their GI bill veterans’ employment preference guarantees. Levine’s reported that in Clarksdale (MS), because “the privilege of being a letter carrier is reserved for Negroes so...in this instance, [they] could use their veterans’ preference.” But, he noted, “Those interviewed could not recall any other examples of veterans’ preference in the state.” Levine discovered abysmal job conditions among veterans in Alabama as well. “Veterans who were trained while in the armed services as electricians or skilled carpenters, pointed out to me that they were not able to get on the job training or jobs in these professions in Alabama, but had to take menial employment while white veterans were receiving on the job training.” At the Montgomery (AL) VA facility, Levine reported, “no Negroes are employed as clerks, counselors, or in any other

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<sup>224</sup> “Mickey Levine’s Report on Trip Through the South,” n.d., MS 2144, AVC Records, Ser. 1, Subjects, Subser. 2, Civil Rights, folder 8: Black Veterans in the South, 1955-1958, GL.

<sup>225</sup> “Mickey Levine’s Report on Trip Through the South,” n.d., MS 2144, AVC Records, Ibid., GL. For an excellent, richly detailed, study of Mississippi as uniquely the most representative region of the South’s historically debilitating socio-economic structure, based upon a racially-structured hierarchy of power, see James C. Cobb, *The Most Southern Place on Earth: The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Southern Identity*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

technical positions.” He did find blacks in jobs at the city’s VA hospital, but “only as laborers.” At Alabama’s Maxwell Army Air Base, Levine found that when hired, unlike white veterans, black ex-servicemen “begin in the mess hall on a job that is akin to K” Further, Levine reported, at Maxwell, “only about a half-dozen Negroes employed...have what might be called ‘skilled positions.’”<sup>226</sup>

In summarizing the underlying basis of Levine’s findings, the Jewish Labor Committee’s national publication, *Labor Reports* noted, that they, “seem to indicate that in some states they read it, “‘White GI Bill of Rights’,” or ‘GI Bill of White Rights’.” As Ira Katznelson has shown, the problem with the GI Bill began when arch-segregationist and Mississippi Congressman John Rankin, as chairman of the committee originating the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act bill in 1944, ensured that its administration would be decentralized to the state level, through federalism, and therefore strongly protective of southern Jim Crow practices. While Katznelson confines his analysis of the GI Bill to the 1940s, Levine’s investigation underscores the damage Rankin’s legislative legacy inflicted on black veterans well into the 1950s.<sup>227</sup>

When asked by the press about Levine’s findings, Deputy VA Administrator John S. Patterson maintained “we lean over backward to see that VA laws and policies are carried out on an equal basis to all.” He also, “denied there is any widespread conspiracy to deny veterans rights to qualified Negroes in the South.” Levine wrote Patterson to express his “misgivings” about his press statements, but

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<sup>226</sup> “Mickey Levine’s Report on Trip Through the South,” MS 2144, AVC Records, Ibid., GL.

<sup>227</sup> The JLC’s *Labor Reports* is quoted in *AVC Bulletin*, June 1956, 3. On Rankin’s maneuverings to ensure decentralization of VA services and benefits see Chapter 5, “White Veterans Only,” 113-141, especially 123-128, in Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action was White: An Untold Story of Inequality in Twentieth-Century America*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005.)

praised the VA for its past progress, and suggested a meeting on “some of these matters.” Patterson agreed to meet at some “mutually agreed date,” and told Levine, “I see no reason for any misgiving,” and said that in his press comments, “My entire premise was that insofar as the [VA] is concerned segregation is a thing of the past.” While it is not clear whether Levine ever met with Patterson, he did request Congressman Adam Clayton Powell to formally ask the VA to address his survey. But Patterson replied to Powell’s inquiry with information supplied by personnel in the agency’s southern facilities, and by reciting, at length, the VA’s formal complaint procedures. In short, the VA did no real follow-up investigation of its own. Nevertheless, Levine felt that the AVC’s efforts were not without some gain. When he passed Patterson’s reply to Powell on to Ken Birkhead for distribution to the AVC’s list of key southern African-American contacts who provided him with material for his report, he noted, “at least the VA is now on the defensive and that they know we have been snooping around in these particular areas.” When the *Afro-American* asked VA officials for their response to Levine’s report, they “had no specific answer to these charges.” Also, despite Levine’s urging, Congressmen Teague failed to hold hearings on the southern report’s findings.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> Patterson’s comments to the United Press reporter are in, Typescript, “[UP] Over City Wire Service,” n.d., MS 2144, AVC Records, Ser. 1 Subjects, Subser. 2, Civil Rights, box 21, folder 8: Black Veterans in the South, 1955-1958; Levine to John S. Patterson, Deputy Administrator, VA, Washington, DC, March 19, 1956, *Ibid.*, GL; Patterson to Levine, April 6, 1956, *Ibid.*, GL; Deputy Administrator, VA, Office of Veterans Affairs to Hon. A.C. Powell, Jr., House of Representatives, Washington, DC, June 8, 1956, attached to Memo, Levine to Ken Birkhead, June 27, 1956, *Ibid.*, GL.; For the *Afro-American*’s encounter with the VA, see the news clipping, *Washington Afro-American*, March 31, 1956, in MS 2144, *Ibid.*, GL. As the paper reported, a VA information official told the paper that he, “did not know whether the central office had made any special check with the regional offices to determine whether colored veterans were getting equal benefits as guaranteed by law.” *Ibid.* On Teague’s failure to hold hearings on Levine’s report, see *AVC Bulletin*, April, 1956, 1,3; and, “AVC Chairman Scores House Veteran Affairs Committee on Failure to Consider Rights of Negro Veterans,” April 28, 1956, MS 2144, AVC Records, Ser. 3, Press Releases, box 79, folder 6: 1955-1959, GL.

Undeterred by these official responses, the AVC launched its “Project Service” office to distribute VA technical benefits information to “Negro veteran leaders throughout the south,” to help black veterans claim their rights to equal services. As the *Bulletin* reported, “Levine found that the lack of this information was one of the great weaknesses faced by southern Negro veterans.” This effort also sought “consultation and advice” from black leaders “in processing claims and securing aid for Negro veterans.” As word of Levine’s study spread in the national press, the AVC headquarters reported receiving numerous inquiries from black veterans for information. These efforts also led to “increased AVC activity” in the South, including the chartering of a chapter in Louisiana.<sup>229</sup>

Besides exposing discrimination in the VA, the AVC also confronted actions by the Eisenhower administration antithetical to civil rights progress. On July 30, 1953, the AVC sent a “strongly worded” telegram to President Eisenhower urging him to withdraw his nomination of South Carolina Governor James Brynes, a leading segregationist, as a delegate to the United Nations: “HIS OPEN AND UNAMERICAN ATTITUDE TOWARD EQUAL RIGHTS FOR ALL AMERICANS CAN ONLY EMBARRASS OTHERWISE STRONG DELEGATION. IN VIEW OF MASSIVE COMMUNIST ATTEMPT TO DISTORT AMERICAN AIMS WE MUST STAND FAST AS TRUE AND CLEAR ADVOCATE OF DEMORACTIC PRINCIPLES. GOVERNOR BRYNES BY HIS

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<sup>229</sup> On Project Service, *AVC Bulletin*, April, 1956, 1.

RECORD DISQUALIFIES HIMSELF AS A SPOKEMAN FOR THE UNITED STATES.”<sup>230</sup>

Numerous civil rights and labor groups also wired the President, arguing that that the Brynes appointment would damage U.S. Cold War interests. As Textile Workers (CIO) national president Emil Rieve informed Eisenhower, “surely [Brynes] does not and cannot represent our country in the parliament of the world. Let us never forget that the majority of the world’s people have skins of a different color than ours.” The Jewish Labor Committee warned the President that the Governor’s “blatant identification with the forces racial intolerance and human inequality will basically weaken the otherwise strong position of the United States,” in United Nations “deliberations on the settlement of the Korea issue.” “His record is so bad,” NAACP head Walter White informed the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, “that he will become the immediate and exceedingly vulnerable target of the communists and other critics of American democracy.”<sup>231</sup>

Some conservative newspapers supporting Brynes attempted to discredit liberals by reversing the terms of their Cold War arguments. “We fail to see,” the *Arkansas Gazette* declared, “what relevancy Governor Brynes’s views on racial matters could possibly have in connection with his new temporary UN assignment. Furthermore, we doubt the Kremlin propagandist would have attempted to capitalize on the Brynes appointment if the NAACP hadn’t paved the way for them.” The *Charlestown News & Courier* (S.C.) denounced Walter White’s objection to the

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<sup>230</sup> For AVC’s protest and the text of its telegram to Eisenhower, see press release, July 30, 1953, MS 2144, AVC Records, Ser. 3, Press Releases, box 79, folder 5: 1950-1954, GL. Emphasis in original.

<sup>231</sup> *The Afro-American*, August 8, 1953, 14. Included among the “scores of other groups” protesting the Brynes nomination to Eisenhower, and also the Senate, were: the National Urban League, ADA Hotel & Restaurant Workers Union (AFL) and Frontiers of America, Inc., Ibid.

nomination as “unpatriotic,” and declared that White “has jeopardized our national unity by his unwarranted criticism of Brynes.”<sup>232</sup>

Despite the flurry of liberal protests to the White House, the Senate confirmed Brynes as a UN delegate on July 31.<sup>233</sup> Considerations of Cold War interests, however, had failed to influence Eisenhower. Instead, as David Nichols has recently shown, the President appointed Brynes primarily to repay him for supporting his candidacy in the 1952 election.<sup>234</sup>

Through the late 1950s, the AVC continued to press the Eisenhower administration to expand civil rights reform. In mid-December 1957, the group protested the announcement by Attorney General William Rogers that the administration had decided not to pursue further civil rights law reform. Since the announcement came only two months after the Soviet Sputnik launch, the AVC seized the opportunity to impress upon the President that the Attorney General’s statement, unless reversed, meant another major Cold War defeat for the administration. As national chairman William S. Ming, Jr. informed Eisenhower, “You, Mr. President, are the only one who can off-set the serious damage done by the Attorney General, both here at home and among our friends in the free world who look to us for leadership in human freedom. We urge you to speak out now, before you go to the NATO meeting so that you do not have to carry this additional burden of another U.S. failure on your shoulders while you are meeting there with the other

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<sup>232</sup> *The Afro-American*, August 8, 1953, 14.

<sup>233</sup> *Washington Post & Times Herald*, August 1, 1953, 9.

<sup>234</sup> On the politics of the Brynes appointment, Nichols, *A Matter of Justice*, 36-37. Nichols notes that Brynes “partly” felt comfortable with his endorsement knowing that candidate Eisenhower did not support a federal FEPC. He also contends that “the timing” of the Brynes nomination was a means for Eisenhower to get the Governor’s support for his newly created President’s Committee on Government Contracts, aimed at preventing racial discrimination on federal projects., *Ibid.*

nations.” To strengthen this appeal, Ming sought to convince the president that Rogers’s statement undercut recent Cold War gains resulting from the August authorization of the 1957 Civil Rights Act. “This country gained somewhat of a propaganda victory with the passage of the civil rights bill this year. The Attorney General’s remarks have offset any victory that may have been won,” Ming observed. In reinforcing this message, Ming noted, “We are certain that when the government scores its first satellite breakthrough and our moon is in space, it will not then call for a ‘cooling-off’ period. The same should hold true following the breakthrough, as small as it was, in civil rights.”<sup>235</sup>

Despite the intensity of the AVC’s civil rights advocacy, its efforts produced only limited results. In some instances, the AVC succeeded in ensuring the passage of important civil rights measures at the state and local levels. In 1953, the local AVC in Oregon served as a leading force in mobilizing a grass campaign, involving a coalition of liberal groups, that resulted in passage of a state law outlawing racial discrimination in hotels, food establishments and public amusements. In early August, the American Jewish Congress’s Will Maslow, mentioned the bill’s passage, along with North Carolina’s anti-Klan law prohibiting masks and cross burnings, as constituting the year’s only two positive signs of progress in state civil rights legislation. Maslow also cited the Supreme Court’s favorable June 8 ruling in the *Thompson, Co. Inc.* restaurant case, which outlawed racial segregation in the District

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<sup>235</sup> William S. Ming, Jr. National Chairman, AVC to President Dwight D. Eisenhower, The White House, Washington, DC, December 11, 1957, attachment in Memo to All AVC Leaders, “Release on Attorney General’s Remarks on Civil Rights, December 11, 1957, MS 2144, Ser. 7., Subser. 1, box 149, folder 5, Board Correspondence, 1954-1993, GL, see also press release, “Call on President to Repudiate Attorney General’s Statement on Civil Rights,” December 11, 1957, Ibid., GL, and *AVC Bulletin*, December, 1957, 3.

of Columbia's public eating establishments, as a major step forward. While dozens of liberal groups, among them the NAACP, CIO and the ACLU, joined in coalition behind the Thompson campaign; the AVC assumed a prominent role in the legal battle by providing numerous amicus curiae briefs in the case that contributed to the eventual Supreme Court victory. The AVC infused its petitions with liberal Cold War Americanism. As the *Washington Post* reported, its October, 1951 brief to the U.S. Court of Appeals declared, "racial discrimination in Washington serves as 'grist for the propaganda mills of the Communists and Fascists all over the world and impairs our international regulations with many nations whose friendship we need.'" Also, in April 1955, the group's legal counsel succeeded in having the U.S. Civil Service Commission eliminate racial identification data from all civilian personnel forms.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>236</sup>For the details of the local AVC's grass roots efforts on behalf of the bill, see *AVC Bulletin*, October, 1953, 3. In March 1953, the *Bulletin* reported that four AVCers helped sponsor the bill in Oregon's legislature. *AVC Bulletin*, March, 1953, 5. The bill was initially drafted, in January 1952, in the home of Portland AVC leader George Dysart. *Ibid.* Also, in March 1953, the *Bulletin* reported that four AVCers in the Oregon legislature (two senators and two representatives) helped sponsor the bill. *Ibid.* As Will Maslow, Director of the Commission on Law and Social Action for the AJC informed the *New York Times*, "Although twenty state civil rights laws were enacted," the Oregon and North Carolina laws were "the only significant measures" among them. Maslow also reported that these two laws also stood out since, "Efforts to enact FEPC laws in the key industrial states of California, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania failed." See Maslow's letter to the editor, *New York Times*, August 11, 1953, 26. On AVC's leadership role in writing the *Thompson* amicus briefs, see *Washington Post & Times Herald*, October 30, 1951, 9; and, *AVC Bulletin*, October, 1950, 4; *Ibid.*, November, 1951, 2.; *Ibid.*, January, 1952, 1; *Ibid.*, May, 1953, 3; *Ibid.*, June, 1953, 2. For reportage of the coalition behind AVC's *Thompson* briefs see *Washington Post & Times Herald*, November 20, 1951, B2. For the Cold War language quoted from AVC's 1951 U.S. Court of Appeals brief, see *Washington Post & Times Herald*, October 30, 1951, 9. *The Afro-American* reported that the AVC's 1951 brief, written by the group's attorneys Phineas Indritz and George Bunn, "has been hailed by leaders in the civil rights fight as one of the most significant contributions to the legal battle to break the nation's Capital's jim-crow community pattern." *The Afro-American*, January 5, 1952, 21. In 1954, some 29 liberal organizations got behind the AVC's legal effort to extend the Supreme Court's *Thompson* case ruling to the District's hotels. *AVC Bulletin*, February 1954, 1, 4. Nichol's highlights Eisenhower's and Attorney General Brownell's pro-civil rights legal intervention in the *Thompson* case, but he does not mention the AVC's key role in the matter. Nichols, *A Matter of Justice*, 28-29, 33. For the Civil Service race data reform, *AVC Bulletin*, April, 1955, 8. Noting that such racial designations were "inconsistent with the President's policy to eliminate all racial distinctions in the Federal Government," the group's Counsel Phineas Indritz initiated its effort to end them the previous July. *AVC Bulletin*, July, 1954, 1. In 1956, Indritz also convinced the American Bar Association to remove racial designations from its application forms. *AVC Bulletin* June, 1956, 3.

While such local legislative and legal gains were important, without the backing of other veterans' organizations, the group was unable to achieve its larger reform goals, such as moving civil rights policy forward in the VA. Given its considerable lobbying power, the Legion might have been able to bring Teague's House Veterans Affairs Committee to convene hearings on Levine's survey of southern VA facilities, and to take action to ameliorate conditions.<sup>237</sup> Had the national Legion rallied its members more numerous voices behind the AVC's call for Eisenhower to reverse himself on the Brynes nomination, given his other pro-civil rights initiatives, he might have found a way to do so. Besides having his attorney general intervene in the Thompson case, Eisenhower took a strong leadership role in ending segregation in the nation's capital.<sup>238</sup> But the AVC could not count on the Legion for support in the fight for civil rights. As will be seen, the Legion preserved segregation within its organizational ranks; and as the legal tide turned in favor of civil liberties and civil rights in the mid-1950s, it stiffened its resistance to liberal change and became a major instrument of segregation.

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<sup>237</sup> As noted above, in fn 236, the *Chicago Defender* believed it was unlikely that Teague would investigate Levine's findings in the absence of support from other veterans' organizations. *Chicago Defender*, March 22, 1956, 4.

<sup>238</sup> On Eisenhower's role in ending public segregation in Washington, DC, see Nichols, *A Matter of Justice*, 26-34. Among other actions, for example, Eisenhower held meetings with film company executives in 1953, and convinced them to put a halt to racial segregation in the city's movie theaters. Previously, both he and Mrs. Eisenhower withheld their patronage of these establishments. *Ibid.*, 34.

## **Chapter 5: The American Legion, Civil Rights, and the Limits of Cold War Brotherhood**

Writing in the May, 1950 issue of *American Legion Magazine*, George N. Craig, the first WWII veteran to serve as the American Legion's National Commander used the occasion of Memorial Day to call upon his fellow Legionnaires, in posts throughout the nation, to actively join in the fight against "bigotry," "bias," and "intolerance." Craig began this appeal by noting that on Memorial Day, "We join our neighbors in a salute of gratitude to the hordes of heroes, from the Revolutionary War to the last great conflict, who died in order that our Republic might live. Mentally, we place a wreath on the grave on the Unknown Soldier in Arlington." But Craig also underscored a sharp distinction between the remembrances of the recent war dead among regular civilians, and those of Legionnaires who served with them in battle. "Memorial Day, for Legionnaires, has a deeper and more intimate meaning than for the average American." Elaborating on this theme, he noted, "[O]ur hearts turn to the many 'known soldiers,' to specific men whom we learned to know and cherish in a common ordeal by fire. They are not an abstraction but comrades-in-arms whose names and faces are indelibly engraved on our private memory. Each of us has his own roster of buddies who paid the supreme price of patriotism. We crave to give them a sign that we have not forgotten through the piled-up years—to pay something on account as it were, on the staggering debt of affection that we owe them." Indeed, Craig's point in making this distinction, one that undoubtedly resonated deeply among many of his fellow WWII veteran readers, was that since their comrades had sacrificed their lives "to ensure the survival of our America; not merely the physical

America but the concepts of human liberty and dignity which the name implies,” it was the duty of veterans to begin, “dedicating ourselves in earnest to the ideals which drew those men into battle...Freedom, Equality, Justice and Tolerance.” As Craig noted, such dedication required active effort. “To the extent we that we labor to apply [these] basic American principles in everyday life, we are paying that debt contracted on the battlefields.” Failure to do so, he noted, brought the opposite result. “By the same token,’ he intoned, “we insult the memory of our heroic dead, we diminish the significance of their supreme contribution if we permit bigotry, intolerance, [and] discrimination to flourish in our midst.”<sup>239</sup>

The larger point, however, of Craig’s linking wartime memories of the sacrifices of the fallen to the need for action against postwar bigotry was to rally Legionnaires behind the nation’s Cold War goals. Drawing attention to the real possibility of atomic Armageddon, Craig stated what by the early 1950s had become an all-too familiar refrain. “Mankind is at a crossroads in its history. Through no choice of our own, merely because we are what we are, the fateful decision of this juncture—between freedom and slavery, between dignified human being and terrorized robot—rest upon us Americans.” The way forward was for Americans to unify in ways that both neutralized the enemy’s appeal, and brought their would-be captives firmly into alliance with the free world. Obliterating bigotry at home in this context became essential for victory in the Cold War. As Craig noted, “Ours is the responsibility of leadership But how can we hope to lead the peoples of this planet into the sunlight of fraternity unless we live as brothers here at home? We must bring

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<sup>239</sup> George N. Craig, “Something to Remember,” *American Legion Magazine* (hereinafter *ALM*.) May 1950, 22.

to the crisis of this period, not alone dollars and military prowess, but moral vitality. It is our obligation, to ourselves and the world, to show an example of a society in which prejudice is counted a disease and discrimination regarded as a crime.”<sup>240</sup>

This kind of unity across religious, ethnic and racial differences was idealized in Craig’s representation of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.<sup>241</sup> “One of the primary things we do not know about the Unknown Soldier is whether he was a Protestant, Catholic or Jew; whether he was native born or an adopted son of our generous Republic. We do not know and we do not inquire. For us it suffices that he was an American, whatever the faith of his fathers or the color of his skin. In this sense he is not only a symbol of patriotic death—but a challenge for patriotic living.”<sup>242</sup> The national commander went on to summarize Legion’s past convention actions, which, he noted, “have taken clear-cut and out-spoken stands against hate-mongering in any form in our land.” In reiterating his call for Legionnaires to uphold the sacrifices of the fallen, Craig re-emphasized the need for them to actively work against intolerance. A convention resolution among an “array of vigorous resolutions on Americanism,” he noted, passed at the Legion’s 1949 convention, like his representation of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, especially embodied the nation’s obsessive Cold War emphasis on effacing signs of domestic disunity because it, “specifically branded as a menace to our common liberties any individual, group, or organization which fosters racial, religious or class strife among our people.” But,

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid.,23

<sup>241</sup> The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington VA, and originally contained the body of one WWI unknown soldier when it was dedicated on November 11, 1921. As soldiers from subsequent wars were interred in the crypt, it was also referred to also as the Tomb of the Unknowns. However, it the tomb “has never been officially named.” See, [www.arlingtonnationalcemetery.org/vistor\\_information/tomb\\_of\\_the\\_unknowns.html](http://www.arlingtonnationalcemetery.org/vistor_information/tomb_of_the_unknowns.html).

<sup>242</sup> *ALM*, May 1950, 22.

Craig observed, “Resolutions on paper...are futile unless they reflect a practical resolve expressed in action. They will have the effect on American life which the conventions intended only if every Legionnaire—and that means you and me—accepts them as directives, as orders of the day.” Noting that, “A number of splendid voluntary organizations are conducting a year-round battle [against] injustice in inter-group relations,” joined by, “[v]arious cities [that] have acted to outlaw bias, through legislation and an enlightened public opinion,” and, [a] good many industries that have set up ‘projects in intolerance,’” Craig asked, “Why should not Legion posts everywhere take the initiative, in line with the specific evils in their own towns and cities, for a tolerant America?”<sup>243</sup> Craig’s representation of the Unknown Soldier can, then, be seen as a synecdoche for national Cold War “Brotherhood.” As the previous chapter revealed, such sentiments regarding the meaning of the sacrifices of the war dead echoed as well in the AVC’s commemorations of the fallen.

For the most part, however, in practical everyday terms, the Legion’s racial practices contradicted the messages Craig articulated in his eulogy to the nation’s war dead. Throughout the 1950s, the Legion’s dominant approach to matters of racial equality and civil rights ensured the perpetuation of practices that dishonored the sacrifices of the fallen as Craig understood them. The Legion largely failed to heed the national commander’s warning that resolutions against racial bigotry and inequality were futile unless they became incorporated into daily life. On civil rights matters, the Legion mainly followed the dictates of its conservative Americanism. While the period did see some steps towards racial equality within the Legion, racial change remained quite minimal.

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 51.

Nevertheless, through their participation in the country's emerging postwar civil rights movement, African American Legionnaires challenged the Legion's racial status quo, often infusing their protests with liberal Cold War Americanism discourse. Their efforts were supported by the AVC, the black press, and, in at least some instances, by white racial moderates within the Legion affronted by their organization's racial policies. While these challenges served to further disrupt and complicate the notion of a unitary, conservative Cold War Americanism in these years, they did not succeed. In the mid-1950s, the Supreme Court, under Chief Justice Earl Warren, began to liberalize its stance concerning the rights of political dissenters, especially the Communist party, and assert preeminent federal jurisdiction over these cases. Most Legionnaires, however, called for the restoration of state authority to define and punish radicals. This desire for state control over civil liberties converged with the states' rights, pro-segregation positions of the Legion's southern units, which further reinforced the organization's racial conservatism. In the absence of stronger pressures for racial reform from within the Legion, the rising sentiment for change among African American Legionnaires accompanying the increased civil rights activism in the nation at large following the Court's landmark 1954 public school desegregation order in *Brown*, remained stifled.

African American Legionnaires confronted a range of racial practices in the 1950s that relegated them to second-class status stemming from the Legion's long-standing policy of permitting racial segregation, but also racial exclusion among affiliates. Beyond requiring "honorable" war service from veterans, neither the Legion's constitution, nor its charter from Congress, placed racial restrictions on

membership<sup>244</sup> As William Pencak has shown, the founding convention in 1919 firmly entrenched a policy of states' rights concerning matters of race. "Rather than lose Southern whites, Northern supporters of black equality allowed each state to reach its own racial solution."<sup>245</sup> In the South, until after WWII, states' rights often translated into racial exclusion. But from April 1946 through August 1947, four Legion state departments, Alabama, Georgia, Florida and North Carolina, voted to permit black membership in segregated posts and other units, ending their whites only membership policy.<sup>246</sup> Although this shift in policy remains to be studied, some southern state Legions feared blacks would join rival veterans' organizations. For example, in September 1946, the *Afro-American* reported that the "formerly lily white" Florida Legion was establishing black posts, "Apparently to forestall the organizational efforts of the American Veterans Committee and other liberal veterans organizations which accept all ex-servicemen on an equal basis."<sup>247</sup>

Legion policy also meant that segregation remained widely practiced in the North as well. In January 1946, New York State Legion deputy adjutant Maurice Stember reported that the unit included, " 'more than a dozen Negro posts... ' although 'theoretically, a Negro veteran could join posts with white veterans.'"<sup>248</sup> Moreover, despite demands by black Legionnaires to end segregation,<sup>249</sup> the Legion upheld its

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<sup>244</sup> *ALM*, December, 1959, 28, 30.

<sup>245</sup> William Pencak, *For God & Country: The American Legion, 1919-1941* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), 69.

<sup>246</sup> *The Afro-American*, April 13, 1946, 1; *Ibid.*, September 28, 1946, 7; *Ibid.*, August 9, 1947, 5.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, September 28, 1946, 7.

<sup>248</sup> *New York Times*, January 10, 1946, 25.

<sup>249</sup> Black Legionnaires demanded an end to segregation at successive national Legion conventions in the late 1940s. See, for example, *The Afro-American*, December 1, 1945, 1; *Ibid.*; October 12, 1946, 7; *Ibid.*, September, 6, 1947, 5. White Legionnaires "attacked and mauled" 30 black veterans picketing the convention hall in October 1946. The pickets demanded equal membership rights in the Legion "on the basis of equality of sacrifice—not race or color." *Ibid.*, October 12, 1946, 7.

states' rights policy through the 1950s. In October 1959, the *Chicago Defender* reported, the North Carolina Legion annually convened its state convention "in two sections, one for whites and one for Negroes." Also, as the group's national body stated in late 1959, "In the Legion, no national rules compel local units to accept or reject members from among patriotic veterans who served honorably without reservation. From among such veterans, each post is the judge of its own membership"<sup>250</sup>

Given its record its record on segregation, why, then, did blacks join the Legion? First, as in previous wars, blacks joined veterans' organizations to gain recognition of their war service and to assert their claims to equal citizenship that service promised to confer on them.<sup>251</sup> Despite its record of segregation, the Legion, a politically powerful and respected force as the foremost veterans' organization in the nation, offered African Americans an important institutional credential to promote and lay claim to federal benefits due them, and to advocate for civil rights. The evidence indicates that Legion posts were often centers of civil rights activism before and after WWII. For example, Linwood Koger, an African-American WWI veteran and an NAACP leader in Baltimore (MD), used his position as head of the Walter-Green Legion post to campaign against lynching in Maryland in the 1930s.<sup>252</sup>

While this chapter provides discussion of postwar civil rights activism among Legionnaires, other evidence suggests that the Legion offered black civil rights

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<sup>250</sup> On the North Carolina Legion, see *The Chicago Defender*, October 17, 1959, 10.; for the statement on Legion membership rules see, *ALM*, December, 1959, 28, 30.

<sup>251</sup> For a discussion of how black Civil War veterans used their membership in the Grand Army of the Republic to advance their claims for equal citizenship rights, see Cecilia Elizabeth O'Leary, *To Die For: The Paradox of American Patriotism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 68.

<sup>252</sup> For aspects of Linwood Koger's civil rights activism see his obituary in *The Afro-American*, September 8, 1973, 5; *Ibid.*, October 28, 1933, 24; *Ibid.*, January 22, 1938, 24.

activists a political shield to better confront red-baiting. After *Red Channels* and *Counterattack* magazine accused Hazel Scott, wife of New York Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, of Communist front activities in late 1950, Scott publicly proclaimed she had recently made sizeable monetary donations to various groups “all headed by anti-Communists and smaller contributions to the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars and to scores of religious organizations.”<sup>253</sup> In short, for black veterans active in the NAACP, a group often targeted as a Red front by those opposing civil rights,<sup>254</sup> Legion membership provided political respectability.

It is also clear that blacks comprised a small percentage of the Legion’s total membership in the 1950s. Although precise information on the number of black members in the 1950s does not appear to exist, a Legion commissioned survey of 600 members, conducted in the winter of 1954-1955, reported 585 (or 97.5 percent) were white, and only 7 (or 1.2 percent) were “non-white.” When the percentage of non-whites in the survey is applied to the total membership of slightly over 2.7 million in 1954, total non-white membership comes to 32,739.<sup>255</sup> This fact provides another reason why the Legion felt little internal pressure to alter its racial practices.

Indeed, aside from disaffiliating its subsidiary unit, the Society of the 40 & 8, over its whites only membership restrictions in 1959, discussed in chapter 6, in the 1950s, the national Legion confined its advocacy of racial equality to issuing

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<sup>253</sup> *The Chicago Defender*, September 23, 1950, 21.

<sup>254</sup> For discussion red-baiting of the NAACP by Southern segregationists, see Jeff Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South, 1948-1968* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 60-62.

<sup>255</sup> “Legion Membership Survey, Winter 1954-1955, Richard Manville Research,” American Legion Records (hereinafter AL Records), Microfilm 96-0010, reel 26B06,, Subject files, Administration & Organization, American Legion Library and Archives, (hereinafter ALLA), Indianapolis, IN; Legion membership in 1954 was 2,786,784. See *Proceedings of the 36<sup>th</sup> National Convention of the American Legion*, Washington, DC, August 30-September 2, 1954, published as *House Document, No. 54*, 84<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 35.

convention resolutions. In April 1952, Allen B. Willand, director of the National Americanism Commission, sent a high school student seeking information on Legion's civil rights policy the Legion's consolidated resolution adopted by the 1948 national convention. The resolution stated the Legion's "belief in the inherent constitutional and equal rights of all Americans, irrespective of race, creed or color" and asked the delegates to "reaffirm its long established policy in this regard." Specifically, it listed six prior resolutions, that began in 1936, which variously condemned "mob violence," "lynching," "racial strife," "religious hatred," and called for advancing "tolerance," and "human decency." The resolution lauded advancements in these areas. "The Legion proudly states ...that great progress has actually been made and is constantly being made... and also feels that The [sic] American Legion has contributed in no small measure to this progress." But in January 1956, the national Americanism Commission reported, "The American Legion has never considered a resolution on segregation." Further, in 1957, Robert Lynch, an Assistant National Adjutant, informed Benjamin J. Bowie Post 228 (Los Angeles, CA) that, "It would not be possible for the National Commander to make a statement on the subject of integration because the American Legion does not have a mandate on this subject." As Lynch noted, "It would appear from the fact that they have so refrained, that [t]he...Legion as an organization does not believe that the problem of integration is one in which our organization should become involved."<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> James R. Durfee, Jr. to American Legion, Indianapolis, Indiana, March 27, 1952 and Allen B. Willand, Director, National Americanism Commission (hereinafter NAC) to Durfee, April 1, 1952, microfilm, 89-2036, reel 22 E 11, Subject files, file: Americanism—Tolerance,; American Legion Library & Archives (hereinafter ALLA), C.A. Tesch, Director, NAC, to Miss Virginia Summers, Librarian, Lansing [Michigan] Public Library, January 5, 1956, Ibid., file: Americanism—Tolerance, Segregation, ALLA; Robert Lunch, Assistant National Adjutant to Mr. Wayman L. Ricks,

The national Legion's publications also studiously avoided identification with the civil rights cause. In April, 1956 cartoonist and WWII veteran Jack Hamm, sent, Jack Little, the Legion's publicity director, samples of his "new series of drawings," depicting scenes of home front inequality and segregation experienced by black veterans. In one cartoon, entitled "Freedom Vehicles," black and white soldiers travel in integrated seating on military trucks and ambulances. In another drawing, mixing WWII and Cold War propaganda imagery, the smirking heads of Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin look down from on high as a white man tells his black counterpart, also in civilian suit-clothes, "Sure, you're a full-fledged American citizen, but *I* decide what you can and cannot do."

In recommending his series to the Legion, Hamm noted, "Most of the veterans with whom I have talked feel that the Negro soldier and those of his race should be made 'full-fledged citizens' of our country. My fellow G.I.'s seem to be of one accord on this." In rejecting the drawings, Little informed Hamm, "I took the matters up with the heads of our various Divisions...the head of the American Legion Press Association, which services our...publications, and even with our National Adjutant." But as Little explained, "Unfortunately, Jack, all of us are unanimous in the opinion that such a controversial subject is not for us. As you probably know, our national Constitution prohibits our taking part in any issue not directly connected with programs of the American Legion."<sup>257</sup>

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Commander, Benjamin J. Bowie Post, No. 228 Los Angeles CA, May 16, 1957, Ibid., file: "Americanism—Tolerance, Segregation." ALLA.

<sup>257</sup>Jack Hamm, Religious Drawings, Waco Texas to Jack Little, American Legion National Headquarters, April 6, 1956; Jack Little, Chief of Press Section, National Public Relations Division to Hamm, April 17, 1956, enclosures in, Memorandum, Little to George Kelly, April 17, 1956, microfilm, 89-2036, reel 22 E 11, Subject files, file: "Americanism—Tolerance, Segregation," ALLA. Hamm's cartoons included lines of biblical scripture in these drawings, which inveighed against

Many Legion units likewise showed little interest in advancing racial understanding or tolerance, let alone equality. In March 1958, for example, the Legion's Post 184 (Hudson, NY) refused to heed the Schenectady NAACP chapter's protest calling for it to cancel its annual charity fund-raising event, the "White and Black Revue," a "blackface minstrel show." As the chapter noted, it deemed the performance, "discriminatory in implication, especially the title." In respecting the NAACP's protest, Hudson's Board of Education unanimously revoked the Legion's use of the high school's auditorium. The Legionnaires responded by moving the show to a local private stage in the Walter Reed, Jr. Community Center. Despite its inability to block its performance at the Reed Center, the NAACP chapter again protested the show in April 1959, for its, "'unfair stereotyping' of the Negro race." Still, the chapter gained some ground when actor Harry Belafonte, invited by the Center management to "witness" the show, complied with its request to cancel his appearance.<sup>258</sup>

Segregation in local units also meant that Black Legionnaires found themselves publicly humiliated by the discriminatory practices of their white

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unequal treatment of others. Ibid. As *Time* reported, Hamm's career primarily as a religious cartoonist was an outgrowth of his desire to become a Baptist minister following his postwar stint at Baylor University. He also took art training in Chicago with study at the Moody Bible Institute. His general career as a cartoonist allowed him to pursue both art and religion, since he managed to supply some 108 newspapers with his religious drawings for free. See "Without Charge," *Time* 57, no. 22 (May 1951) 69.

<sup>258</sup> The details of the case are in: *Chicago Defender*, March 22, 1958, 10; *The Afro-American*, March 22, 1958, 7; *New York Times*, March 13, 1958, 58; *Chicago Defender*, April 25, 1959, 19. The *Afro-American*, (March 22, 1958, 7) also reported that NAACP's local protests of the show began some 2 years before. The fact that the NAACP Chapter also took its 1958 appeal to the State School Board in Albany, which may have influenced the local board's vote, see *Chicago Defender*, April 25, 1959, 19. Belafonte was in the local area in 1959, "shooting scenes for his next picture, *Odds Against Tomorrow*," Ibid. *New York Times*, June 10, 1959, 19. Less surprisingly, southern units also featured minstrel shows. In December 1957, for example, the Mississippi State Legion's newspaper reported, its Allein Post arranged for Vicksburg performances of the Honey Boy Minstrels, "one of the few minstrel shows now on tour. *The Mississippi Veteran*, December 1957, 6.

counterparts. For its mid-1956 General Council meeting in Omaha, Nebraska, for example, the Congregational Christian Churches secured overflow rooms for its delegates at the local Legion's clubhouse. The clubhouse, however, refused a room to Legionnaire A. Langston Gordon, an African American delegate. While church delegates appealed to local Legion post officials with protests, they were rebuffed. As *Christian Century* reported, "they sustained the decision of their [clubhouse] employee, maintaining in spite of their public advertisement of accommodations for travelers that theirs was a private club for whites only." After failing to get satisfaction from city officials, the church group brought suit against the post.<sup>259</sup>

The presence of many African Americans active in the emerging postwar civil rights movement within the Legion ensured that these discriminatory practices would not go unanswered.<sup>260</sup> For example, WWII veteran Rouville M. Fisher, commander of both the Alabama 10<sup>th</sup> district and Mobile's Dubose-Tatum Post 302, until his passing in July 1951, was active in "other civic work, particularly the NAAC" Robynn English, a First World War veteran, of the all-black George L. Giles Post, No.87 in Chicago's Southside district, actively participated in his Letter Carriers Union and the NAAC In1957, he published a novel, *Citizen U.S.A*, which advanced the case for full racial equality in the United States. African American women Legionnaires likewise took active roles within the nation's major civil rights organizations. In early August 1954, Mrs. Minnie Banks, District of Columbia's Legion Auxiliary vice-president,

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<sup>259</sup> "Church Sues Legion on Civil Rights," *The Christian Century*, 73 no. 28 (July 11, 1956), 820.

<sup>260</sup> The pattern of civil rights activism among African American Legionnaires discussed here, and in subsequent Chapters, stands in sharp contrast to Michael Kazin's recent observation that segregation in local units means that, "It hardly needs to be said that the Legion community excluded all but the most subservient blacks." Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion, An American Story* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 181.

joined local civil rights activist Mary Church Terrell among the featured speakers at the National Association of Colored Women's (NACW) Washington, DC national convention in 1954. In the summer of 1946, NACW members picketed the White House to protest a wave of southern lynchings. Julia West Hamilton, the first president of Washington DC's James E. Walker Post 26 [Women's] Auxiliary once served as NACW's national treasurer, and was among the first women to chair the District NAACP's membership committee. Other black Legionnaires served on official public bodies concerned with racial matters. In early 1951, Boston (MA) Mayor John Hynes appointed Major Stephen Douglas, commander of the Legion's all-black William E. Carter Post, No. 16 to a committee composed of "50 prominent men and women...to study racial tension...and develop a program for the improvement of relations among the various religious groups."<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> For Fisher's biographical information see his obituary in, *Chicago Defender*, April 21, 1951, 2. Fisher is also listed as a founding member of the Dubose-Tatum Post 302 chartered in November, 1947, which then included members from Pascagoula, MS as well, see "Application for Post of the American Legion," Charter Application,, Dubose-Tatum Post 302, Mobile, AL, dated (received) November 24, 1947, in Chapter Files (unprocessed,) AL HQ, Indianapolis, IN (hereinafter Chapter Files, AL HQ.) The Dubose-Tatum Chapter application contains no information indicating its "colored" status. However, given its Deep South location, Fisher's leadership and its extended Mississippi jurisdiction suggests it was a modestly resourced black post. On Robbyn English, *Chicago Defender*, March 4, 1957, 8; for the George L. Giles Post's status as a segregated black post see, Chapter Application, George L. Giles Post, No. 87, Chicago, IL, dated January 13, 1926, in Chapter Files, AL HQ. Reflective of the Legion's poor relations with African Americans, the Giles unit's officers explained on their application that, "Our post is in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> wards of Chicago, being a colored post, and we often have difficulty in convincing many of them that the Legion is not against them in any way or another." On Mrs. Minnie Banks's activism, *Chicago Defender*, July 31, 1954, 14; for mention of the NACW's 1946 anti-lynching protests see Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 20, 21, 23. For Terrell's 1950s Washington, DC civil rights activism, see David A. Nichols, *A Matter of Justice: Eisenhower and the Beginnings of the Civil Rights Revolution*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 28, 32, 33; for Julia West Hamilton's civil rights work, Washington Post & Times Herald, January 8, 1954; Major Douglas's appointment is in *Chicago Defender*, January 27, 1951, 12; for Post 16's status as a "colored" unit, see Chapter Application, William E. Carter Post, No. 16, Boston, MA, dated July 27, 1920, in Chapter Files (unprocessed,) American Legion Headquarters, Indianapolis, IN (hereinafter, Chapter Files, AL HQ.) While some Chapter files contain self-identifying information indicating their status as a segregated black post, in other instances staff marked incoming Chapter applications with the designation, "colored post."

The participation of African Americans in the Korean War provided one source for assertions of home front civil rights activism by black Legionnaires. In early September 1950 James E. Walker Post 26 forwarded its letter to the *Washington Post* entitled, "Memo to Fighters," which its membership "unanimously endorsed and adopted," in answer to Soviet U.N. Security Council delegate Malin's comment about, "Negro troops fighting in Korea under compulsion of their capitalist masters." Addressed to the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment fighting at the front, a unit composed of black and white troops, but "with a large preponderance of colored enlisted men;" the letter linked the battle there, "a righteous cause, against a tyrannical, crafty, insincere, and evil enemy," to the efforts to achieve civil rights at home. "The heart of America is sound, the conscience of America is being revitalized and righteousness and fair play and the belief in the brotherhood of man are steadily gaining way. We are moving toward the day of the realization of the American ideal. You, out there on the battlefields of Korea, are playing a significant part in hastening that day." The post also assured domestic readers that the job of advancing civil rights would be undertaken under American methods. "Here in the homeland, good Americans of all races, creeds and colors are solving the internal problems by good straight forward American methods, namely dissemination of the facts, conferences, discussions, the courts and the ballot." The letter also extolled the Cold War Americanism of home front and frontline efforts. "You are fighting to maintain and preserve the best concept of government yet created by the mind of man. You are showing by your deeds your attitude to totalitarian dictators and we want you to know that we, here at home, feel as you do. Paraphrasing a cryptic remark by Joe Louis, we say that there is

nothing wrong with the United States that Red communism can cure, or that we want it to cure.”<sup>262</sup> In short, the realization of racial change would not mimic “Red” revolution, but rewarded and earned through sacrifice on the battlefield and legitimate forms of democratic struggle at home.

Black Legionnaires also used official Legion ceremonies and their positions in the organization to assert claims to expanded rights and space in the political culture as equal citizens. In September 1958, the all-black George Davis Post No. 116 (Brooklyn, NY), presented Dr. Garner C. Taylor with its Americanism Award, for his, “valued services in promoting the American way of life, and his unique contributions to the community.” In his acceptance speech, Taylor, a Greater New York Urban League vice-president and Concord Baptist Church pastor, told the some 2,000 guests assembled in the church’s Memorial Hall, “any person who assumes the posture of defiance to the law of the land is in treason against the Republic.” Similarly, when New York City’s “predominantly white” Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. Post 1775, “unanimously” elected black surgeon Dr. Sylvester J. Carter, post commander in June 1956, also using Cold War language, he stated his intentions to use his position to carry out civil rights work. As the *Chicago Defender* reported, “the new commander said he will call upon the post to lead the way in the fight for civil rights for all Americans as it has led the battle against subversion.”<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> See the editorial, “Memo to Fighters,” by Douglas Richardson, Commander and Ruth Carter, Adjutant, James E. Walker Post 26, *Washington Post & Times Herald*, September 13, 1958, 10. Ruth Carter’s status as post adjutant suggests a degree of gender equality within black posts in need of further study.

<sup>263</sup> As Post No. 116’s Chapter application noted, “This is a racial post[,] the only colored post in Kings County,” see Chapter Application, George Davis Post No. 116, Brooklyn, NY, dated April 20, 1920, in Chapter Files, AL HQ. Dr. Taylor’s award ceremony is in *New York Times*, September 20, 1958, 19 and *Chicago Defender*, September 20, 1958, 20. Dr. Carter is quoted in *Chicago Defender* June 9,

The prestige and authority given to civil rights reform by the May, 1954 *Brown* decision ruling racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional raised the expectations of many African Americans for accelerated change. As it became apparent that resistance to the Court's authority endangered reform some black Legionnaires demanded that the Legion intervene on behalf of the new constitutional mandates. In July 1955, for example, John D. Silvera, Commander of the Jesse Palmer Post No. 1068, an all-African American Brooklyn, (NY) unit, wrote national commander Seaborn Collins, to mobilize the entire organization behind the Supreme Court's May 15, 1955 "all deliberate speed" order, in order to help bring about local community compliance with *Brown*. Pointing to the failure of states and localities to comply with the Court, Silvera make the case for the group to intervene by interpreting the Legion's mission as consistent with Cold War liberal Americanism. As Silvera argued, "This advocacy of lawlessness is contrary to the best interest of the nation and can only serve to damage the prestige of the United States in the eyes of the rest of the world. As a dedicated group sworn, by its constitution to uphold law and order and to 'transmit to posterity the principles of Freedom, Justice and Democracy,' we are duty bound to oppose it." Silvera then laid out several steps for action. In addition to issuing a policy fully backing the Court's desegregation order, Silvera insisted that the Legion, "must call upon public officials at all levels to be calm and to cease inciting citizens to rebellion." While making its position on obeying the Court "known and felt through every means at its disposal, reaching down into every cross roads and hamlet in this great Nation," Silvera also declared

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1956, 3. The *Defender* also added that Carter "expected them [the Post] to give some help with Harlem community projects." Ibid.

that, “The Legion must join forces with organizations such as the NAACP [my abbrev.] in making the Constitution a guide for day-to-day living for every single American.” Collins essentially dismissed Silvera’s appeal by simply restating the Legion’s formal procedures for submitting resolutions through the organization’s state affiliate structure, “through regular channels,” to the national convention. Despite segregation within affiliates, Collins reminded Silvera, “It has always been the policy in this organization that there shall be no discrimination as to race or creed among our members.”<sup>264</sup>

African American Legionnaires also used national conventions to combat segregation they experienced both in the Legion and in their communities. At the start of the Legion’s 1954 national convention held in segregated Washington D.C., two local black units, James Reese Europe Post 5 and the James E. Walker Post 26, issued “threats of a picket line” to protest the white imposed “social club code” prohibiting them from use of the District of Columbia Department’s headquarters and clubhouse facility. The local black posts also protested the issuance of so-called “courtesy cards” or passes, from the DC Department, which temporarily suspended segregation in all convention related activities, including access to access its own office and clubhouse. One such event included the “moonlight” boat ride to Mt. Vernon. But since after the convention, boat rides to this patriotic shrine and access to DC

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<sup>264</sup> For an overview of the dashed hopes for accelerated reform after *Brown*, see William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey, American Since World War Two*, 5th edition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 146-150. John D. Silvera, Post Commander, Jesse Palmer Post, No. 1068, Brooklyn, NY to Mr. Seaborn Collins, National Commander, The American Legion, June 17, 1955, Microfilm 89-2036, reel 22e11, Subject Files, file:Americanism—Tolerance, Segregation, ALLA; Collins to Silvera, June 23, 1955, Ibid., ALLA. The all-black Post 1068 was formed in December 1932, and despite the economic crisis, the unit indicated dedication to Legion ideals in noting that, “All comrades are urged to buy [Legion] caps and uniforms to make a good showing on patriotic and memorial days.” See Charter Application, Jesse Palmer Post, No. 1068, dated December 28, 1932, in Charter File, AL HQ.

headquarters would revert to the whites only policy, Post 26 members, led by their first WWII veteran, declined to accept the pass cards. As the *Chicago Defender* noted, “local Negro Legionnaires say they want the ban dropped permanently.” However, as late as August 1956, whites continued to deny their African American counterparts access to the DC headquarters facilities.<sup>265</sup>

Photographic evidence of the Georgia Department’s participation in the 1954 convention parade published in the *Chicago Defender* give the appearance of integration and equality. They show black and white veterans vigorously marching forward, not in racially separate rows, but intermingled.<sup>266</sup> Given the lengths to which the DC Legion went to issue the “courtesy cards,” it is clear that the Legion found segregation, and the protests it produced, damaging to its image. From the vantage point of white Legionnaires adhering to segregation, this representation can be seen as staged, a temporary accommodation to racial equality for public relations purposes, in the same way the boat ride to George Washington’s birthplace, a symbolic site of national patriotic founding and democracy, was only momentarily an egalitarian event. However, from the perspective of the black marchers, their participation can be interpreted as a protest against the un-photographed segregation and other discriminatory practices they sought to abolish. Legion national conventions then, as

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<sup>265</sup> The details of the 1954 convention protests are in: *Chicago Defender*, September 11, 1954, 2, 12; *Washington Post & Times Herald*, August 23, 1956, 15. Both the James E. Reese Post 5 and the James E. Walker Post 26 dated from WWI shortly after the Legion’s 1919 founding, see, *Washington Post & Times Herald*, August 8, 1920, 51 and *Ibid.*, January 3, 1921, 31; It is also clear that their civil rights activism dated from the immediate post WWI era. In 1924 at the District of Columbia Department’s 6<sup>th</sup> annual convention, for example, Post 26 secured adoption of its resolution, “seeking the appointment of colored physicians and surgeons on the advisory medical counsel of the veterans bureau [sic].” *Washington Post & Times Herald*, August 19, 1924, ES10.

<sup>266</sup> For the Georgia contingent’s parade photograph, see *Chicago Defender*, September 11, 1954, 12.

revealed in the Georgia contingent's photograph, in part, became performances of contested Cold War Americanism.

To be sure, the Legion was not all together devoid of some positive instances of racial change and reform interest in this period. Several affiliates displayed their capacity for increasing fairness and equality. In early September 1954, the Wisconsin Legion included an African American in its state delegation to the national convention in Washington, DC.<sup>267</sup> In October 1956, Memphis born Charles Simmons, Jr. became the first black commander of Colorado's District 6, which gave him supervision of five posts, including Denver Post 1, then the largest such unit within the Legion. At its 1952 convention, the Michigan Legion elected an African American as its state chaplain. Further, in January 1951, the Pennsylvania Legion supported the state assembly's Fair Employment Practices bill. In July 1956, the District of Columbia Legion called for the Justice Department to investigate the White Citizens Councils, but it turned down a competing resolution stipulating that the Councils be declared, "subversive" and . . . placed on the Attorney General's list of subversive organizations." Other reforms gave blacks some recognition, but

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<sup>267</sup> On Wisconsin, see *Chicago Defender*, September 4, 1954, 22. Wisconsin's black delegate was Andrew Jackson, service officer of Milwaukee's Col. Charles Young Post 389. Like many of his white counterparts, he maintained a high degree of civic activism, as a civil defense Block Warden, vice-president of the Service Officers and Child Welfare Association, Fifth District Boy Scout Committee member, vice-president of the Mt. Zion Baptist Church Deacon Board, and member of Free & Accepted Mason's Corinthian Lodge No. 5., Ibid. On the high rate of civic activism among WWII veterans, see Suzanne Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens: The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 124. Col. Charles D. Young Post 389, a "colored," post, was named after the famous black officer in Pershing's Punitive Expedition against Pancho Villa. Young became the first African American to earn his rank in the Regular Army units; but he was retired involuntarily to prevent his promotion to general at the start of WWI. See <http://arlingtoncemtery.net/cdyoung.htm>, and David Kilroy, *For Race and Country: The Life and Career of Colonel Charles Young* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003). For Post 389's "colored" status, see Charter Application, Charles D. Young Post 389, February 28, 1939, Charter Files, AL HQ.

preserved segregation. For example, in August 1956, the Texas Legion authorized equal voting representation to its segregated black units at conventions.<sup>268</sup>

As these examples indicate, racial change in the Legion remained quite limited. The unwillingness of the District of Columbia Department to attack the White Citizens Councils as “subversive,” however, points to a major factor that served to reinforce the racial status-quo and limit the prospects for racial progress in the Legion. By the late 1950s, as southerners increasingly mobilized around the strategy of “massive resistance” to the emerging civil rights movement, the Supreme Court, under Chief Justice Earl Warren, increasingly liberalized its interpretation of laws governing the civil liberties of radicals. The Court also established exclusive federal jurisdiction and control over sedition legislation, therefore rendering state laws in this area unconstitutional. Within the Legion, members concerns about preserving strong state enacted anti-radical legislation converged with southern Legionnaires’ interest in using states’ rights arguments to forestall racial integration. The overlapping of these two interests reinforced the group’s conservatism, and, in turn, foreclosed upon chances for further racial reform.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>268</sup>*Chicago Defender*, November 10, 1956, 8; Michigan’s Chaplain was the Reverend Carlyle F. Stewart, who also served as pastor of Ebenezer AME church, *Chicago Defender*, August 30, 1952, 9; *Chicago Defender*, January 27, 1951, 19; *Washington Post & Times Herald*, July 22, 1956, B2. On Texas, see *Washington Post & Times Herald*, August 7, 1956, 43. In June 1960, the Bronx County Legion elected Raymond Carney as its first “Negro” commander, a WWII veteran who served in the European Theater as “a sergeant with the 364<sup>th</sup> Combat Engineers.” *New York Times*, June 26, 1960, 52; *Chicago Defender* January 27, 1951, 19.

<sup>269</sup> On the Supreme Court’s mid-1950s liberalization trend with regard to the civil liberties of radicals, and Southerners general use of it to gain support for their states right’s agenda see, Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes, McCarthyism in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 352-353; for an overview of the Warren Court’s liberal turn regarding radicals’ rights, see Michael R. Belknap, *Cold War Political Justice: The Smith Act, the Communist Party, and American Civil Liberties* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), Chapter 9.

The U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in *Pennsylvania v. Nelson*, in April 1956, established exclusive federal authority to prevent the violent overthrow of the government and nullified Pennsylvania's 1919 sedition law that convicted Communist Party leader Steve Nelson. The *Nelson* decision helped to place the Legion squarely behind a staunch defense of state's rights. In May 1956, the Legion's National Executive Committee (NEC) issued a resolution declaring its strong disapproval of the *Nelson* decision. It urged the Congress to " 'preserve the powers ' of the states to enact and enforce anti-subversion laws." Legionnaires also passed various national conventions resolutions that called for the restoration of state authority over anti-radical legislation, and denounced the Court for weakening those laws. At the 1956 convention, members approved a resolution that demanded, "Remedial action to permit each state to enact anti-sedition legislation within its own limits." They passed another resolution which declared that the expansion of federal control, to the detriment of states' rights, "will eventually result in a socialistic or dictatorial form of government." Three southern state departments sponsored the latter resolution, joined by Nevada.<sup>270</sup>

The 1958 convention adopted a combined resolution that denounced *Nelson*, and called for "strong action to prevent further usurpation of states rights...through

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<sup>270</sup> For the *Nelson* decision, see entry, *Pennsylvania v. Nelson* by Dean Alfange Jr., in Kermit Hall, James W. Ely and Joel B. Grossman, eds., *The Oxford Companion to the Supreme Court of the United States*, Second Edition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 728, Alfange notes intense opposition in Congress defeated efforts to reverse the Court's *Nelson* ruling. The Court's *Nelson* decision upheld the Pennsylvania Supreme Court's reversal of Nelson's conviction. For the point that Pennsylvania's 1919 sedition law convicted Nelson, see Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes*, 126-127. For the NEC's reaction to the *Nelson* decision, see *New York Times*, May 6, 1956, 78. For the 1956 states' rights resolutions, see Resolutions 139 and 75, in *Proceedings of the 38<sup>th</sup> National Convention of the American Legion, Los Angeles California*, September 3-6, 1956, published as *House Document, No. 43*, 85<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 51. The southern state sponsors of resolution 75 were: Louisiana, South Carolina and Virginia, *Ibid*.

judicial legislation by the United States Supreme Court.” It also praised the Pennsylvania Department’s role in winning the state assembly’s passage of a public school curriculum stressing the Constitutional limit on federal power, since it “is a crucial base of our democracy and represents our most powerful weapon in the fight against the Communist conspiracy.” This invocation of conservative Cold War Americanism in opposition to Supreme Court authority continued through the decade. In his attack on a spate of 1957 U.S. Supreme Court rulings overturning the convictions of well known Communists, in particular *Yates v. U.S.*, (which involved 14 California Communist Party members), the Legion’s national commander Preston Moore declared, “The fact of the matter is that a combination of irresolution and poor judgment in high places has put in jeopardy the internal security of the United States.”<sup>271</sup>

When Legion units in the South went on record for state’s rights to oppose federal desegregation efforts, they tied the loss of state sovereignty to radical subversion. The Mississippi Legion’s 1957 convention, for example, protesting federally imposed integration of veterans’ hospitals in the state maintained that, since it prevented social discord, “the practice of segregation...will make this state and nation invulnerable from attacks from within and without.” Further, the resolution declared, “We...assert, that the safety and security of this nation...on the other hand will be weakened and ultimately destroyed by integration to the delight of those who

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<sup>271</sup> See consolidated resolutions 143 and 142, in *Proceedings, 40<sup>th</sup> National Convention, American Legion, Chicago, Illinois*, September, 1-4, 1958, published as *House Document, No. 40, 86<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Session*, 62-63; for Moore’s comment, see *Los Angeles Times*, January 6, 1959, C1; for the run of 1957 Supreme Court rulings see entry, *Communism and Cold War*, by Michael R. Belknap in Kermit Hall, et al, eds., *The Oxford Companion to the Supreme Court*, 198-199, and the entry *Yates v. United States*, by Milton R. Konvitz, *Ibid.*, 1108.

would destroy our form of government.” The unit’s conflation of radicalism with racial reform also led it to call for the state legislature to investigate the NAACP as a subversive organization, since it maintained, the group “has been found in other states to be controlled and intermingled with various subversives...and has had a tendency to support various causes and legislation that...disrupt, and in many cases, threaten our traditional [sic] American way of life.” The national Legion gave its blessing to this line of reasoning at its 1956 convention, when it approved a Texas Department resolution for it to investigate the NAACP “to ascertain the truth or falsity of the charges that this organization is influenced by communists and their fellow travelers.”<sup>272</sup>

The alliance being forged in the Legion around anti-radicalism and states’ rights also surfaced in national commander W.C. “Dan” Daniel’s remarks before Georgia’s state legislature in late January 1957. Daniel “commended the body for their advocacy of states’ rights,” to the extent he also stated that the Legion shared Georgia’s adherence to those principles, and that he “would be willing to fight to uphold Georgia’s traditional policy of states’ rights.” In explicating his position, Daniel used conservative Cold War Americanism language. “Arrogation of power by a central government was fast reducing the states to municipal dependencies,” he observed. Further he declared, “An all powerful central government is the vehicle that

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<sup>272</sup> For the Mississippi Legion’s anti-integration resolution see, “Resolutions of 1957 Department Convention,” *The Mississippi Veteran*, August 1957, 5; on the unit’s call for the state legislature to investigate the NAACP, *Mississippi Veteran*, August, 1957, 4; for the national Legion’s anti-NAACP resolution 421, see *Proceedings of the 38<sup>th</sup> National Convention of the American Legion*, 49. On the general conflation of civil rights with subversion in the South, see Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 28.

the Kremlin hopes to ride in conquering our free land, as was the case in so many of the countries in eastern and central Europe.”<sup>273</sup>

The Cold War language of states’ rights segregationists to promote their racial agendas helped to ensure that critics of Daniel’s speech would interpret it as pro-segregationist. This remained the case despite the Legion’s official press release declaring that the International News Service had retracted its initial report that Daniel said he would fight not just to protect Georgia’s states’ rights, but also its policies of segregation.<sup>274</sup> To some units, the official explanation for what Daniel said was insufficient. As the Ohio State Legion’s top officers informed Daniel in March, 1957, “We have received much criticism as respects [sic] this incident, and none of

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<sup>273</sup> Daniels’ remarks are in Telegram, Charles W. Geile, Public Relations Division to David C. Leach, Chicago IL, n.d., Microfilm 89-2036, reel 22e11, Subject Files, file: “Americanism—Tolerance, Segregation.” ALLA; Geile’s telegram quoted the Legion’s press statement on Daniel’s remarks, which, as he noted, “the National Commander authorized for release.” A year earlier, just days prior to the national convention, which approved its states rights resolution and elected Daniel national commander, Daniel told the *Los Angeles Times*, “I’m convinced the Kremlin hopes to use centralized government as a vehicle to destroy our form of government.” *Los Angeles Times*, August 29, 1956, 2. In fact, as a member of the Legion’s National Americanism Commission (NAC) Daniels helped engineer the writing and passage of passage of the 1956 resolution. In the months preceding the convention, he and a small group of NAC members drafted the resolution and worked to funnel it directly to other Commission members, tasked with its distribution to their respective state departments, in order to build support for it locally. The details of this process are in: Richard C. “Dick” Cadwallader, Member, NAC to James F. Daniel, Jr. Chairman NAC, June 5, 1956, James F. Daniel, Jr. to W.C. Daniel, June 11, 1956, W.C. “Dan” Daniel to James F. Daniel, June 14, 1956, James F. Daniel, Jr. to C.A. Tesch, Director, National Americanism Commission June 16, 1956, Tesch to James F. Daniel June 19, 1956, June 19, 1956, Tesch to James F. Daniel, June 20, 1956, all in, M-Film 89-0236, reel 22 E11, Subject Files, file: Americanism—Tolerance, Ibid., ALLA. The group was well aware of Southern sectional interests involved in the resolution. As Cadwallader told James Daniel on June 5, building support through a number of state departments, “would keep the resolution from having a ‘southern’ tinge to it and would thus be far more effective on the national scene.” Ibid., ALLA.

<sup>274</sup> Telegram, Charles W. Geile, Public Relations Division to David C. Leach, Chicago IL, n.d., M-Film, 89-2036, Subject Files, file: Americanism—Tolerance, Segregation, ALLA; on the INS’s retraction of its report on the segregation word, see Robert Lynch, Asst. National Adjutant to Archie Closson, Lodi, CA, July 12, 1957, Ibid. Lynch also told Closson after learning from him of the defeat of a black post’s resolution opposing Daniel’s comments at a California Legion convention, that “at the time we received a lot of communications and protests, none having come in for the past several months, we were hoping it was a dead issue.” Ibid. After Daniel spoke, Georgia’s Governor also commissioned him as “an Honorary Colonel on his staff.” George Osborne, Georgia Dept. Commander to James V. Day, National Public Relations Div., American Legion, Washington, DC, January 30, 1957, Ibid.

the explanations to date have clarified or controverted the accusation that you stated that the position of the American Legion is similar to that of Georgia.” Other Legionnaires protested Daniel’s comments using liberal Americanism. Mrs. Betty Green Young, a founder of the Oberlin, Kansas first women’s post, declared: “by his stand Commander Daniel has made the Legion principle of freedom, justice and democracy ridiculous or is the Legion going to uphold these principles only for those citizens who happen to have white skins?” Given her husband’s and daughter’s Legion membership, she noted, “I had considered my family a Legion family.” But she made it clear, “if the Legion is taking a pro-segregation stand, we’ll have to sever all connection.” In early February, the African-American William L. Carter Post 16 (Boston, MA) told Daniel, “The members of...Post 16...request to be informed, when the American Legion voted *not* to uphold the Constitution and to defy the edict of our Supreme Court, which ended segregation in the Public Schools of the Country.”<sup>275</sup>

Also, in early February, in “An Open letter to the National Commander of the American Legion,” E.B. Weaver, commander of the all-black Grady Mabry Post, 506 (Rome, GA,) told Daniel, “Now Sir, at this particular time and especially during the session of the Georgia Legislative bodies, there is quite a bit of controversy over

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<sup>275</sup> Fred Thacker, Dept. Commander, Rabbi Nathan Zeilzer, Dept. Chaplain, and Thomas W. Applegate, Dept. Judge Advocate, The American Legion of Ohio to W.C. “Dan” Daniel, March 14, 1957, M-Film 89-2036, Subject Files, file: Americanism—Tolerance, Segregation, ALLA; Mrs. Betty Green Young and Mrs. R.S. Young, Oberlin, KS, to The American Legion Executive & Administrative Officers, January 26, 1957, Ibid.; George Simmons, Post Commander, William E. Carter Post 16, Boston, MA to Dan Daniel, February 12, 1957, Ibid. In learning of the defeat of a black post’s resolution opposing Daniel’s comments at a California Legion convention, Asst. National Adjutant Robert Lynch noted that, “at the time we received a lot of communications and protest, none having come in for the past several months, we were hoping it was a dead issue.” Lynch to Closson, July 12, 1957, Ibid.

questions pertaining to civil rights, state's rights, school rights, integration, segregation and etc. Unfortunately, it seems that things are not enough to set brother against brother and, buddy against buddy [i.e. veterans]; yet in the name of peace, it is the prayer full hope of the Unit that these things will be resolved for the best interests of all the people, of all races contained on this continent." While appealing for racial unity in this way, Weaver informed Daniel that he, and his post comrades, considered Daniel's remarks a betrayal of their understanding of Americanism. "We, (supposedly your buddies, Sir.), may be a bit naive, but, we are also a little confused at your spirited and encouraging statements given to one side in this controversy, same statements being particularly encouraging to any person or groups...who may wish to set themselves up in defiance of...the Constitution of our Country." To members of Post 506, Daniel's comments undermined their interpretation of the Legion's commitment to the "one hundred percent Americanism" as stated in its preamble: defense of the Constitution, fostering of "law and order," and the ideals of "Justice, Freedom and Democracy." Weaver concluded by expressing his members' hope that the Legion's would act in accordance with their understanding of its purpose. "We are a small Post, but we have been proud to believe in the Ideals of our Legion organization, and *We pray God*, that we can keep this pride and our faith in God and Country."<sup>276</sup>

The AVC entered the Daniel controversy in early January, when national chairman Mickey Levine characterized Daniel speech as un-American for following the path of segregationists, which he argued, also undercut the nation's Cold War

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<sup>276</sup> E.B.Weaver, Commander, Grady Mabry Post #506, the American Legion, Dept. of Ga., Rome, GA to Mr. W.C. Daniel, February 11, 1957, M-Film, 89-2036, Subject Files, file: Americanism-Tolerance, Segregation, ALLA.

interests. As Levine declared, “We would urge, in the name of law and order, as citizens and as veterans, that in behalf of human rights as against states rights you would declare that the American Legion is not going to become a part of a plot to keep millions of our people, of which no small number are veterans who fought so gallantly alongside us in the armed services, in the role of second class citizens.” Further, Levine added, “Not only will your reported statement have deep repercussions in our nation...it cannot fail to weaken America’s position in the free world...Endorsement of segregationists by our largest veterans organization could provide a valuable tool for our enemies in their struggle for the minds of men.” This point was not unfounded. As Mary Dudziak notes, the Soviets used “the race issue prominently in anti-American propaganda.” The AVC also rejected the Legion’s claim that the INS had actually retracted its report that Daniel stated he would defend segregation in Georgia. As the *AVC Bulletin* reported, “No such apology has been made public by the wire services according to the best evidence available at AVC headquarters.” The black press denounced Daniel in similar terms. As a *Chicago Defender* February 14 editorial entitled, “The Un-American Legion,” observed, “If democracy is not the ultimate objective of the American Legion, and we take it that the Commander’s statement resolves that question, then it goes without saying that the brand of Americanism that the Legion advocates is in reality a prototype of the Master-race doctrine which both Kaiser Wilhem and Adolph Hitler attempted to push through in their mad dash for world hegemony. If this estimate be correct, the American Legion is in essence a grave danger to American democracy and free institutions everywhere.”<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> While the AVC issued Levine’s letter to Daniel in its press release on the affair, I did uncover

Whether Daniel actually used the word segregation in his defense of Georgia's state's rights or not, in the context of southern resistance to the emerging civil rights movement, his statement could only serve to strengthen the strong states' rights agenda within the Legion being forged by the backlash to Warren Court's approach to matters of civil liberties and civil rights. The fact that protests over Daniel's remarks predominantly came from African-American posts and only scattered white units, reveals the dominance of conservative anti-radical and segregationists forces within the organization. Protests by the AVC and the black press, invoking liberal Americanism, could not effectively counter the Legion's racial conservatism. A look at the role of southern Legionnaires in their region's massive resistance to the civil rights movement further underscores the hegemony of racial conservatism within the organization.

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Levine's original letter in the American Legion Archives, however, a reply from Daniel was not found. See, MS 2144, American Veterans Committee Records, Series 3, Official Statements, Press Releases, box 79, folder 6: 1955-1959 (hereinafter; MS 2144, AVC Records, Ser. 3), GL; *AVC Bulletin*, February, 1957, 1, 4. Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 12. For Levine's original letter forwarded to Daniel by the Legion's Washington, DC office, see Levine to Commander W.C. Daniel, January 29, 1957, enclosure in Memorandum, Freda O'Donnell, American Legion, Washington, DC to William Hauck, Director, Washington DC Office, American Legion, January 31, 1957, M-Film, 89-2036, Subject Files, file: Americanism—Tolerance, Segregation, Ibid., ALLA, in the memo, O'Donnell states she is passing Levine's letter to Hauck so that the national commander can determine if it is important. *Chicago Defender* February 14, 1957, 9. The *Chicago Defender's* February 2, 1957, 1, story stated that Daniel's vowed to uphold Jim Crow in Georgia by defending state's rights, but it did not use the word segregation to make this point. The Legion's national adjutant nevertheless answered the story by restating the INS retraction claim. E.A. Blackmore, National Adjutant, to Editor, *Chicago Defender*, February 5, 1957, M-Film, 89-2036, Subject Files, file: Americanism—Tolerance, Segregation, ALLA. Blackmore's letter appeared in the *Chicago Defender*, February 23, 1957, 19.

## Chapter 6: “May the Spirit of Our Boys Who Fell in Battle Live Forever”: The American Legion and Massive Resistance.

In June 1951, the police in Natchez, Mississippi took part in, “the forceful halting, for the second consecutive year of the annual Negro Memorial Day parade,” organized by the Frederick Patterson Legion Post, an African-American unit. Although the Post obtained permission for the parade’s route, the issue, nonetheless, seems to have been its passage through “the heart of the business district.” Delayed for almost an hour, police released the parade, which eventually made its way “to the national cemetery,” to carry out remembrance services. Incensed by the incident, the state-wide African-American Elks Club convention meeting in Biloxi a couple weeks later, issued a resolution against police violence directed at blacks, and urged its members to “take steps to see that assaults, blackjackings, and other forms of violence against Negroes in Mississippi be discontinued.”<sup>278</sup> In the context of the emerging civil rights movement, such incidents reflected the growing unease of southern whites over the physical presence of organized African Americans. But the use of the police to interfere with a Memorial Day procession also highlights the fact that black veterans were among the most ardent activists in the postwar struggle for civil rights.

Many black war veterans placed themselves in harm’s way again by fighting on the home front for the rights of citizenship they believed they had earned through their war service, but which were, nonetheless, being denied to them. As the civil rights movement intensified in the South during the 1950s, whites developed the

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<sup>278</sup> The Natchez Memorial Day parade is in *Chicago Defender*, June 23, 1951, 5.

strategy of “massive resistance,” in opposing racial change. These efforts included the creation of new organizations, such as the White Citizens Councils, and the use of violence to prevent racial integration. White resistance expressed itself in the revival of southern nationalism, built around a conservative Americanism stressing an extreme defense of state’s rights, white racial dominance, and anti-radicalism. In defending their states against the intrusions of federal authorities and liberal organizations seeking racial reforms, southern nationalists regarded themselves as performing their patriotic duty to uphold their region and nation against what they perceived as unwarranted centralized control by the state and communist-inspired subversion of the social order.<sup>279</sup> Among the South’s most loyal patriots and nationalists, many white Legionnaires were in the forefront of their region’s opposition to African Americans’ fight for freedom. The response of white southern Legionnaires to the struggle of William Walker Post 214, a Jackson, Mississippi black Legion unit in the forefront of the civil rights movement, and President Eisenhower’s military intervention in the Little Rock crisis, in particular reveal the strength of anti-radical and states’ rights interests underlying the national Legion’s policies regarding segregation. Drawing upon Cold War liberal Americanism discourse in their civil rights activism, black Legionnaires and their allies, primarily the AVC and the black press, challenged the white backlash among southern

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<sup>279</sup> For discussion of black veterans’ expectations for citizenship rights after WWII and their denial, see Ronald R. Krebs, *Fighting for Rights: Military Service and the Politics of Citizenship* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), Chapter 7, and Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), Chapter 5, and the secondary sources mentioned in fn 280 below. For an overview of Southern “massive resistance” in the 1950s, see Numan Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950s*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999). For excellent discussion of the revival of southern nationalism and its ideological content, see Jeff Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare:*

Legionnaires, as well as the national Legion's policies. These efforts, however, proved to be ineffective.

Post 214's involvement in civil rights was a part of the growing activism in Mississippi among other African-American posts and black civic associations. During the 1956 Christmas holiday season, black Legionnaires and Auxiliary members from posts in Clarksdale and Mound Bayou joined their counterparts in VFW posts, the United Order of Friendship and the Knights and Daughters of Tabor in a relief drive to aid black farm laborers in their struggle to obtain fair wages from white plantation owners. Unable to get a settlement, workers and their families received this local assistance, along with a railcar of coal and two vans of "clothing, food and toys," sent in by California contributors and those in other northern locales, but still "hundreds had to be turned away." Dr. T.R.M. Howard, directing the Mississippi Regional Council of Negro Leadership, coordinated the relief effort against the combined forces of the landowners and the state's White Citizens Council. For its part, Post 214 served as a unit in the front lines of the fight against segregation. As the *Afro-American* reported, the Post's commander, Albert Powell, "has been very outspoken against segregation. He has been equally active in the NAACP" Further, Medgar Evers, then field secretary for the Mississippi NAACP, also served as the Post's service officer.<sup>280</sup>

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*Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South, 1948-1968* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), esp., 2-4, 51-52.

<sup>280</sup> On the relief effort, *Chicago Defender*, January 7, 1956, 3; for Powell's civil rights activism *The Afro-American*, March 8, 1958, 1; on Evers' position in Post 214, *Ibid.*, and *Ibid.*, December 28, 1957, 1, for the identification of Evers as the Post's service officer see the editorial "Why Investigate the N.A.A.C.P.?" in *The Mississippi Veteran*, March 1958, 2. Evers became the state's NAACP field secretary in December 1954, see Charles Payne, , *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 51; Evers remained in his NAACP position during the showdown with the Legion, see *The Afro-American*,

Beginning in May 1957, the civil rights activism of Post 214 soon embroiled it in a major confrontation with the Mississippi Legion. After learning of joint meetings between local White Councils and two white Legion posts in Jackson, Mississippi, in early May, Congressman Charles C. Diggs, Jr. “called for investigation of the growing trend for white American Legion posts to meet with citizens’ councils.” He also learned of a higher level of political activity between the councils and the state Legion, noting that, “Mississippi’s white citizens’ councils and veterans organizations have criticized Gov. James Coleman and his ‘state sovereignty commission’ for approving construction of a racially integrated veterans’ hospital in the state; they point out that the commission ‘is paid to defend segregation.’” On May 10 Diggs sent a telegram to the Legion’s national commander Dan Daniel about the joint meetings. As Diggs asked, “How can an organization which professes Americanism as its foundation act in public concert, on an official basis, with such a hate organization as the White Citizens’ Council? If the National American Legion does not reject this kind of Association, it will certainly indicate that it has rejected its fundamental

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December 28, 1957, 1. How the American Legion (black or white units,) or AVC (discussed below) figured into the civil rights struggle in Mississippi has not been examined by any of the leading and most recent scholarship. John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 13-18, briefly mentions the legacy of WWII veterans as part of the leadership mix, but does not take up veterans organizations. Charles Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*, 13, 24-25, 30-31, 47, 56, 66, 136-137, 171, 181-182, 299, 404, comments much about the role of WWII veterans in civil rights leadership roles, including the attempt of Medgar Evers and his war veteran brothers’ 1946 attempt to vote in Decatur after demobilization. But Payne does not identify or discuss veterans organizations. Robert Francis Saxe, *Settling Down, World War II Veterans Challenge to the Postwar Consensus* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 187, 130, 190, a study focused on the late 1940s, also discusses, very briefly, Evers’s 1946 attempt to vote in Decatur and identifies him as a later member of AVC, but he does not discuss or explore why and when he joined (as discussed in fn 281 below). He also adds a general point about black veterans, such as Evers and some others, who became important in the civil rights leadership. Further, *The Autobiography of Medgar Evers: An Hero’s Life and Legacy Revealed Through His Writings, Letters and Speeches* (Cambridge, MA: Basic Civitas Books, 2005) a recent compilation of Evers’s writings, by his wife and a prominent historian, does not discuss veterans, the Legion or AVC.

purpose, the promotion of Americanism.” In a letter to Diggs, Daniel said he could not comment since he had no knowledge of these events. Diggs wired Daniel again on May 21, and included a detailed reference to the joint meeting notice for May 6 that appeared in the May 5 *Jackson Clarion Ledger*. Diggs also noted, “Your response...is an incredible insult to my intelligence.” On May 24, the unit’s state commander Jack Pace, in a public issued announcement, which conflated civil rights with subversion, ordered all “Negro” posts to “rid their membership of radical agitators or face expulsion from the organization.” This directive came on the heels of Albert Powell’s accusation against the Jackson police for corruption, (in the form of “liquor payoffs,”) and for “brutalities against Negroes.” When Jack Pace issued his “radical agitators” directive, he also declared that Congressman Diggs “had no business” investigating Legion activities with the Citizens Councils, and observed, “with respect to the Citizens Councils part in the meeting [with local posts], we are delighted to see other organizations are waking up to the dangers of communism.”

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On December 18, Fred Metcalfe, the Mississippi Legion’s new commander, and a large Leflore County plantation owner, issued a directive canceling Post 214’s charter. In early March, Post 214 officers and members appeared before a committee appointed by the state body’s executive committee to defend themselves against charges that the post’s officers violated the constitution by, “using their official positions...to promote the ideals and purposes of the N.A.A.C.” The examining

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<sup>281</sup> For Diggs’s May 10 and 21 exchanges with Daniel, *The Afro-American* June 8, 1957, 12. On Pace’s directive and Cong. Diggs’s investigation of the joint Legion-White Citizens’ Council meetings see, *New York Times*, May 26, 1957, 36, and *Chicago Defender*, June 1, 1957, 1; *The Christian Century*, July 17, 1957, 874; for Pace’s comments concerning Diggs’s investigation, *Chicago Defender*, June 1, 1957, 1, and *New York Times*, May 26, 1957, 36.

committee's report denounced the officers for using the post "to further their zeal for the left wing dominated NAAC" Further, it recommended permanent revocation of the charter, not removal of its officers, because, "We find it would do no good...as the members of the post have assented in or acquiesced in the action of its officers in reelecting them and in refusing to do anything to prevent their using the officers in the Legion to disseminate partisan principles." With the committee's recommendation in hand, the executive committee permanently revoked Post 214's charter. In a word, the state body intended to eliminate the threat Post 214 presented to the existing racial and economic order. The report did not mention the joint activity between white Legion units and the White Citizens Councils. Such coordinated action apparently did not qualify as prohibited activity because it held the line against "radical" racial integration and equality, the state Legion deemed to be a threat to the region. As Pace maintained earlier, the state Legion welcomed the Citizens Councils' participation in the fight against Communist subversion it attributed to the work of the NAAC<sup>282</sup>

Reports in the black press actually substantiated the charges that Post 214 advanced the mission of NAAC In July 1957, the *Chicago Defender* noted, "Mississippi Negroes of voting age have just been urged to go 'to your circuit clerk's

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<sup>282</sup> On the initial, December 18, charter cancellation, *New York Times* December 19, 1957, 42, and *Chicago Defender* December 28, 1957, 3; on Metcalfe's status as a plantation owner see his biographical information, American Legion Records (hereinafter: AL Records), unprocessed file, "Death Memorandum, Fred R. Metcalfe, Jr., November 5, 2002," in "Mississippi—History File, Biographies, M-N," American Legion Library & Archives (hereinafter: ALLA). The obituary form in this file notes, "he was the owner and operator of Runnymede Plantation, which was later known as Shongolo Plantation." For the committee's report and the Executive Committee's decision to permanently revoke the charter, *The Mississippi Veteran* April, 1958, 1. Apparently seeking legitimacy, the committee report noted, "At the conclusion of the report, the Department Executive Committee, which has four Negro district officials on it, accepted the report, commended the sub-committee, and voted to revoke the charter of William Walker Post 214, and ordered it to turn its charter and all assets and property over to the Department Headquarters." Ibid. It did not, however, indicate how the black officials voted or what they thought about the case..

office in your respective county and district and present yourselves for registration.’ This was the command of William Walker Post, No. 214, of the American Legion Department of Mississippi issued in an open memorandum to Mississippi Negroes.” This report, with its military-like wording urging blacks to report for duty and register to vote is what likely so disturbed the Mississippi Legion, and the entire local white power structure. From their vantage point, veterans were recruiting and mobilizing the black citizenry, as readying them for a great offensive. Worse still, in a ceremony held in Laurel in late September 1957, Robert Hearn, president of the Laurel Youth Chapter of the NAACP received the group’s initial charter from the “guest speaker,” Post 214’s commander Albert Powell. In yet another sign of their role in a mass mobilization, black Legionnaires were now involved in recruiting the young as well.<sup>283</sup>

Post 214 officials and their allies immediately mobilized to fight the charter revocation. Medgar Evers utilized a rhetorical strategy to neutralize the opposition’s effort to characterize the Post as “radical.” As Evers told *The Afro-American*, “I understand the Post is said to be dabbling in partisan politics, but anyone who’s contrary to Mississippi beliefs is considered a ‘radical agitator.’” He also drew from the Legion’s national preamble, (as had Post 506’s commander Weaver in the Daniel affair,) with its talk of defending the U. S. Constitution and democracy, to depict state Legion officials as usurpers of the organization’s ideals, and claimed that the Post remained guiltless in supposedly having violated the group’s constitutional provisions. While Albert Powell announced he would appeal the case to the Legion’s

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<sup>283</sup>*Chicago Defender* (Daily Edition) July 22, 1957, 21; for the ceremony see *Chicago Defender*, September 28, 1957, 17.

national body, John Silvera, commander of the black Jesse Palmer Post 1068 (Brooklyn, NY), called upon national commander Gleason to “explain” the charter revocation for “racial agitation,” and to, “order Legionnaires to refuse post halls as meetings places for White Citizens and subversive groups.” He also asked Gleason to, “create a commission to plan for Legion activity in civil rights.” Gleason dismissed Silvera’s suggestion, ensuring that the states’ rights policy of the national Legion remained unchanged. As Gleason told Silvera the Legion “would not interest itself in race, color or creed.” Silvera subsequently told the *Afro-American*, “Mr. Gleason’s reply means that Legion halls will continue to be used for meetings admittedly called for the purpose of attacking the U.S. Supreme Court.”<sup>284</sup>

Clarence Mitchell, then director of the NAACP’s Washington D.C. Bureau, used his column in the *Afro American* regarding Silvera’s protest, to further extol the patriotic contributions of Post 214, by casting its members as law abiding, staunch defenders of the nation’s highest legal principles. As he noted, while “some white Legion posts in the South have put that organization on the side of those who are preaching defiance of the U.S. Constitution,” Post 214’s members, “publicly advocate compliance with the Supreme Court.” As Mitchell declared, “the Legion must not allow local officials to use Klu Klux Klan definitions in the name of a great national organization of veterans. Up to this time, the national officials have been able to escape some share of responsibility on the ground that if they had no official notice of what is happening. Now they have it.” The *Afro-American*’s editorial, “The Legion of Reaction,” and its accompanying cartoon targeted the Mississippi Legion directly. It

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<sup>284</sup> *The Afro-American*, December 28, 1957, 1; *Ibid.*, April 5, 1958, 6; for Silvera’s comments, *Ibid.*; February 15, 1958, 1.

gave notice of the state Legion's success in having "persuaded the state legislature to investigate the NAAC" While lambasting the state Legion's working relationship with the White Citizens Council and for having "tagged such patriotic organizations as the ACLU and ADA [my abbreviations] as "subversive," it placed much of the group's behavior on older veterans. "Steeped in reaction, the American Legion is controlled by aging veterans of WWI who fought in a jim crow [sic] army, retained a segregated organizational setup and still pay allegiance to an outmoded concept of 'separate but equal.'" While the reference to WWI undoubtedly rang true, the point elided the fact that state commander Metcalfe was himself a WWII Navy veteran, a status he undoubtedly shared with many of his pro-segregation Legion peers, who likewise fought in a racially segregated military.<sup>285</sup>

These discrepancies, however were surely were not unknown to the editors, whose purpose seems more to have been to portray the events surrounding Post 214 as occurrences best relegated to the interwar past, as contrasted with the promise of genuine postwar equality. This point comes out in the editorial's cartoon titled, "Americanism—Mississippi Version." It depicts a large, somewhat rotund, thick-necked white Legionnaire, in full Legion military uniform, who stands with his left arm angled authoritatively against his substantial coat belt, bearing an arm band labeled, "American Legion." His left hand also clutches a slightly rolled up document, reading, "Alliance With Miss. White Citizens Councils." In his right hand, held close to his mid section, he dangles a set of handcuffs with one manacle opened,

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<sup>285</sup> For Mitchell's remarks and his position in the NAACP, *The Afro-American*, February 15, 4; and *Ibid.*, March 29, 1958, 4; on Metcalfe's WWII Navy service see AL Records, "Death Memorandum, Fred R. Metcalfe, Jr., November 5, 2002," in "Mississippi—History File, Biographies, M-N," ALLA; the Legionnaire cartoon is in, *The Afro-American*, March 22, 1958, 4. For an excellent discussion of racial segregation in the military during WWII see, Gerstle, *American Crucible*, Chapter 5.

at the ready. He looks backward over his left shoulder with a scowl, head tilted chin-up. The entire pose suggests the image of a strutting Nazi or Brown Shirt. The caption reads: "It's our patriotic duty to teach that the NAACP demanding equal citizenship is subversive." In this capacity, the Legionnaire in uniform, a symbol of past patriotic duty to God and Country against authoritarian dictatorship, is placed in the service of domestic reactionary elements whose activities efface its meaning. The once well-regarded war hero is now but a willing mercenary of hate.<sup>286</sup>

The *Afro-American's* subsequent editorial further reinforced these messages. In addressing the state Legion's charges that Post 214's association with the NAACP violated the Legion's constitutional rules, it asked, "The ideals and purposes of the NAACP are to advance the cause of colored citizens, secure their rights guaranteed under the constitution and promote the blessings of democracy for all people. Most of us have taken for granted that the American Legion stood for the same things. If they don't, just WHAT DO THEY STAND FOR?" The editors then raised the issue of the Legion's potential as an Un-American threat to the nation. "If their purposes and ideals are counter to this and they are dedicated to some ulterior and sinister program cleverly hidden beneath their pretensions of super-patriotism, both the public and veterans contemplating joining their ranks need to know just what their program is. We have seen what the Black Shirts did for Italy, what the Brown Shirts did for

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<sup>286</sup> *The Afro-American*, March 22, 1958, 4. For recent discussions of how WWII, was to an important extent, defined as a war against racism see Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 9-11; and Gerstle, *American Crucible*, Chapter 5.

Germany, and what other fascist organizations have done. We cannot afford to let that happen here.”<sup>287</sup>

Immediately following the state Legion’s initial suspension of Post 214, the AVC joined the fray in late December 1957, by offering the beleaguered post a charter. In keeping with its non-segregation policy, the AVC’s offer stipulated that the new unit would need to be opened to whites. In the group’s public statement on the charter, national chairman William Ming excoriated the Legion for its segregation practices, and declared, “It is a monstrous thing what the Legion is doing to honorably discharged veterans who served the American armed forces, fighting for freedom, and now they find themselves thrown bodily out of a so-called patriotic American veterans organization.” In early January 1958, Albert Powell thanked the AVC for its action, and noted, “of course we are more than interested,” but he also stated that for the moment, the post remained set on its present course of appealing to the Legion’s national office. As Powell declared, “we are going to fight this thing here to the finish and we mean just that, for we have contributed much to the organization and we are not going to take INJUSTICES sitting down.” Shortly afterwards, Powell informed the AVC’s executive director Kenneth Birkhead that, “we are still interested in the offer...and as soon as we receive the necessary information from you we will go about setting up an organization of the AVC here.” Birkhead reinforced the AVC’s determination to provide its fullest support to Post 214. As he told Powell, “We appreciate your desire not to bow down to the dictates of the Legion leaders there,” and, he added, “Possibly, there may be some legal work or

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<sup>287</sup> *The Afro-American* April 5, 1958, 5. The editorial’s last sentence is likely a reference to Sinclair Lewis’s 1935 novel, depicting a domestic fascist takeover of the United States. Sinclair Lewis, *It Can’t Happen Here* (New York: New American Library, Penguin Group USA, 2005).

other similar activities which we may be able to carry on for you.” He also told Powell that other veterans stood behind him: “keep up the good fight and rest assured that there are many thousands in our organization and, we are equally sure, in the Legion itself, who abhor the kind of thing that was done to you and your fellow members of the Jackson post.”<sup>288</sup>

Post 214’s internal battle with the Legion hierarchy in one sense proved fruitless. As Powell explained to Birkhead in late October 1958, “We appealed the State Dept. decision to the National Dept. But even until now nothing clear has been handed down by the National Body—the State Dept. with the aid of race traitors have set up a puppet group bearing our name and number.” As Powell noted, the state Legion had re-chartered Post 214 and staffed it with blacks they had handpicked to serve as its new officers. In early November, the *Afro-American* also reported that the NAACP recently voiced its “disapproval of colored veterans who joined Mississippi Department...posts in the face of the continuing insults to colored veterans,” and that,

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<sup>288</sup>Press release, “AVC Offers Charter to Ousted Legion Negro Post,” December 20, 1957, MS 2144, AVC Records, Series 9, Local Chapters, box 189, folder 4: Jackson, Mississippi Chapter, #319, 1950-1959, (hereinafter, Ser. 9, Local Chapters), GL; Albert Powell, Commander, The William Walker Post 214, Jackson, MS to Mr. Kenneth Birkhead, Executive Director, AVC, Washington DC, January 7, 1958, *Ibid.*, GL; Birkhead to Powell, January 14, 1958, *Ibid.*, GL; *The Afro-American* reported on Powell’s appeal to the National Legion May 31, 1958, 6; as did the *Chicago Defender*, March 25, 1958, 4; for other reports of the AVC’s Charter offer, *AVC Bulletin*, December 1957, 1; and, *New York Times*, December 20, 1957, 55. The AVC originally contacted Powell through James Edwards, of the Edwards & Evans Burial Association and Funeral Home in Greenville, MS, who Mickey Levine met on during his 1956 Southern tour. See, Kenneth Birkhead to Mr. James Edwards, December 20, 1957, *Ibid.*, GL. AVC’s previous presence in the area ended when it revoked Jackson, MS Chapter #319’s Charter in July 21, 1950, after placing it on the inactive list in August 2, 1949 for having less than the ten members required for a Charter, see Joe Clorey, AVC National Secretary to Thomas A. Armstrong, Chairman, Jackson Chapter, AVC 319, August 9, 1950, *Ibid.*, GL. The AVC’s Jackson Chapter, then with some 417 members, proved to be a key force in the 1946 Senate hearings held there to investigate Theodore Bilbo. “Seventy-five percent of the Chapter’s...membership testified at the hearing, and the Chapter’s far-reaching influence throughout the state was responsible for hundreds of Mississippians appearing to testify.” *AVC Bulletin*, February 15, 1947, 2. Both Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*, 24-25, and Saxe, *Settling Down*, 186-187, point out veterans’ participation in the Bilbo hearings, but neither discuss the AVC’s role.

“posts have been ordered to stay out of NAACP activities.” Despite the defeat of their appeal to the national Legion to intervene on their behalf, Post 214’s members succeeded in another sense. As Powell’s report to Birkhead continued, “Frankly we have won a moral victory for almost daily we are getting calls from all over our State in relation to AVC units. Here in Jackson on November 15<sup>th</sup> we hope to have (11) eleven veterans ready to form a group under the AVC Banner.” Powell’s organizing effort did not stop there. He noted his strategy included getting AVC materials “into the hands of responsible men whose interests are now in the AVC and when we get organized in Jackson we plan a mass exodus of veterans from other groups all over the state.” Powell also included a copy of his group’s press release announcing the organizing plan, which they sent to the Associated Press and United Press International. Framed in the language of liberal Americanism, it expressed their deeply felt sense of patriotic outrage over the Legion’s repressive policies. Pointing especially to the Mississippi Legion’s use of “race traitors to perpetrate treacherous practices against other Negro veterans within this state who dare to exercise their individual right of freedom of speech,” it further noted that, “such actions have motivated freedom loving veterans to ally themselves with an organization that does not engage in such...o[b]vious practices of race hate and bigotry, and to invite all freedom loving veterans who fought and bled for such right[s], to join them regardless of color, creed or religion.” With Powell’s communication in hand, the AVC’s new executive director Irwin Lichliter forwarded him a charter application and membership cards.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> Powell to Birkhead, October 22, 1958, and attached press release, “American Veterans Committee Units Proposed for Mississippi,” MS 2144, AVC Records, Ser. 9, Local Chapters, box 189, folder 4,

The AVC's role as an ally within of 1950s civil rights movement in Mississippi actually began in early 1955, when it contributed \$5,000 to the Tri-State Bank, which the NAACP set up to provide funds to blacks financially penalized by whites for their civil rights activities. The group also called upon its "chapters and members [to] deposit savings in the Memphis Bank." At its 9<sup>th</sup> annual convention 1955, the AVC conferred its first Citizenship Award on T.R.M. Howard, leader of the Mississippi Regional Council of Negro Leadership for his civil rights activism in the state. In February, the group focused attention on the need to prevent the arch-segregationist Mississippi Senator James O. Eastland from assuming, by seniority rules, an open seat on the Senate Judiciary Committee. The group's petition to the Senate protesting the matter contributed to its effort to cast Mississippi segregationists as operating thoroughly outside the boundaries of America's democratic legal order. "As veterans who fought against lawlessness of Nazi tyranny...and Communists aggression in Korea, we cannot stand idly by while there is a possibility that one who has impeded the work of the Senate and flouted the constitutional power of the nation's highest court is in line to be elevated to the

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"Jackson, Mississippi Chapter, #319, 1950-1959," GL. Powell added his signature to the press release, and inscribed the note: "This has been sent to Associated Press & United Press International." Ibid., GL; *The Afro-American* November, 1, 1958, 6; Irwin Lechliter, AVC Executive Director, to Powell, October 27, 1958, MS 2144, Ibid.. Although Powell's subsequent career remains to be studied, it is clear that the AVC maintained a strong working relationship with Medgar Evers until his assassination on June 12, 1963. As AVC's Feldman informed the NAACP's John Morrell, while Evers joined the AVC 1959, "From 1960 until his death we worked closely on many projects." These activities included racial integration of the Jackson's Veterans Hospital, including the patients' wards. J. Arnold Feldman, AVC Executive Director to Mr. John A. Morrell, Assistant to the Executive Secretary, NAACP, New York, NY, August 29, 1963, *Papers of the NAACP, Part 24: Special Subjects, 1956-1965, Series B: Leagues and Organizations, American Veterans Committee* (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1997), microfilm Reel 29, frames 2008-2009 (hereinafter, *Papers of the NAACP, Part 24, Series B: Leagues and Organizations, AVC*, microfilm Reel 29); on Evers's assassination, James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations, The United States, 1945-1968* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 481.

chairmanship of the committee most concerned with the legal structure of the United States.” The AVC’s strategy aimed at having the Senate invoke Rule 24, which it reminded the chamber’s members, “allows the full Senate to have a voice in the choosing of members and chairmen of standing committees.” The group also argued Eastland’s seating would harm America’s image “in the eye’s of the world,” and its “leadership in the struggle against the evils of communism, if we hand the chairmanship of this vital committee to a man who defies laws and hinders the democratic process.”<sup>290</sup>

The AVC’s efforts to portray Mississippi as un-American place, outside of the country’s mainstream democratic political culture, is especially evident in characterizations accompanying its plan, announced in January 1956, to “take drastic action against the growing lawlessness,” there. The plan, laid out by national chairman Mickey Levine, called for immediate intervention by federal law enforcement officials, “to uphold the laws of the national government,” along with, “a voluntary boycott against the products of Mississippi.” Its last two measures, “a committee for political refugees from Mississippi terror and a ‘Radio Free Mississippi’ to break through the ‘Magnolia Curtain,’” unambiguously depicted the state as akin to a Soviet bloc nation. The radio program was needed, as Levine stated, “so that the people of that State ‘may discover what the civilized people of America

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<sup>290</sup> *AVC Bulletin*, March, 1955, 1. As Payne notes, the Tri-State bank was established as a black-owned institution in January 1955 so that outside money would reach activists. Its strategy proved successful in that white banks ended their sanctions to stop this practice. While Payne notes “the NAACP, and other groups, including organized labor,” contributed funds, he makes no mention of the AVC. Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*, 46. *AVC Bulletin*, November, 1955, 1 and *Washington Post & Times Herald*, October 31, 1955, 15. Howard’s Council was based in Mound Bayou to promote blacks’ economic interests, see Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*, 31-32. For the full text of the AVC’s petition, “A Petition to the United States Senate, February 28, 1956,” *AVC Bulletin*, February, 1956, 2.

think’.” Levine initially outlined the plan to *Look Magazine* writers and in a national ABC news interview, immediately after *Look* published details of Emmett Till’s 1955 murder as related by two Mississippi whites, subsequently acquitted for the crime. In his appeal for “veterans of this nation” to focus on problems in the state Levine declared, “We fought against lawlessness in the world. Now we have to face up to lawlessness at home.”<sup>291</sup>

There is no evidence the specifics of the plan went further than the announcement of these proposals. As much as anything it reflected the AVC’s intense frustration and moral outrage over Mississippi’s escalating anti-civil rights violence. But at least one of the group’s key allies and even some AVC’ers gave the plan a cool reception. Congressman Diggs for one told Executive Director Birkhead, “Although no one feels more strongly about initiating corrective action, I feel that some of the proposals are impractical and intemperate.” Diggs worried especially about the impact it would impose on the state’s black citizens. “I would particularly oppose any movement which would result in a mass evacuation of Negroes from Mississippi. My experience from visits there convinces me that such a proposal plays right into the hands of the White Citizens Councils, who recognize the potentiality of the high percentage of Negroes in Mississippi and are attempting to drive at least 500,000 of them into other states.” In opposing Levine’s proposals, the AVC’s Lou Pakiser fell back on his faith that Americans’ beliefs in freedom and democracy would largely “eliminate these weak spots,” such as Mississippi, “without rash and ill-conceived

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<sup>291</sup> For the AVC’s plan for Mississippi, *AVC Bulletin*, January, 1956, 1. The application of the Iron Curtain metaphor to the state does not appear in Dudziak’s *Cold War Civil Rights*; but C.R. Darden, Mississippi’s state NAACP president, at the group’s annual convention in 1958, “described the state as ‘behind America’s Iron Curtain,’ in his address.” *The Afro-American*, November 22, 1958, 3.

statements and actions.” Pakiser further argued that the state’s whites, “are not inherently lawless and that they wish to behave as loyal American citizens.” Under this assumption, Pakiser noted that while some measures would be required to bring about the South’s compliance with Supreme Court mandates, “a declaration of war is not in order.” Pakiser viewed the plan, in essence, as having strayed from what he regarded as one key aspect of the nation’s Americanism. As he noted, “It is a basic tenet of our religious faiths and of American democracy that all men have within them the possibility of redemption. This is no less true of racist Mississippians than, say the Communists fellow-travelers of the ‘30s. We do not banish Mississippi from the Union to bring about the redemption of Mississippians.” Charles Hubbell agreed with Pakiser, noting that, “I’m sure that our national officers have their hearts in the right place,” but, he argued, “ We need to work...in a way that has the majority of Southerners accepting and supporting the end result. May be that seems impossible, dark as things look now. But if we don’t think it can be done, we don’t have much faith in our fellow man.”<sup>292</sup> These opinions served to further elaborate the AVC’s liberal Americanism.

The crisis precipitated by the attempt to desegregate Little Rock, Arkansas’s Central High School in the early fall of 1957 belied Pakiser’s faith that something like “a declaration of war” was unnecessary to foster meaningful racial change in the South. The unprecedented intervention by the Eisenhower administration into Little Rock’s desegregation controversy especially sharpened the debates between the AVC

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<sup>292</sup> Diggs to Birkhead, February 8, 1956, MS 2144, AVC Records, box 21, Ser. 1, Subjects, Subser., 2, Civil Rights, box 21, folder 8: Black Veterans in the South, 1955-1958, GL; for Pakiser’s comments, *AVC Bulletin*, March, 1956, 2; Charles H. Hubbell, Ann Arbor (MI) to Dear Fellow-AVCer’s April 15, 1956, MS 2144, AVC Records, folder 8: Black Veterans in the South, 1955-1958, Ibid., GL

and the Legion concerning the legitimate use of federal authority and the meaning of American democracy. Confronted by Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus's ongoing refusal to comply with court-ordered desegregation mandates and the escalation of mob violence by local whites over the presence of a small group of black students entering Central High on the morning of September 23, President Eisenhower did what he had previously hoped to avoid. On September 24, in order to restore law and order and end the violent resistance to integration of the school, the president deployed elements of the U.S. Army's 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division to Little Rock, while simultaneously federalizing the Arkansas National Guard directly under his command.<sup>293</sup>

This action sent southern Legion units into a frenzy of denunciations over what they deemed as an unwarranted intrusion of federal power. In its resolution attacking the President's actions, Alabama's 5th District American Legion, representing 5,000 members in four counties, invoked a multiplicity of meanings about the Cold War, wartime sacrifices, and even Southern womanhood. The group sent their protest directly to the President "by registered mail". One portion of their resolution turned the federal government's Cold War civil rights propaganda on its head. "The only justification we have ever heard for the enforced integration is to combat communist propaganda. We in the South have never nor shall we ever attempt to live in such a way as to please the communists—the United States Army

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<sup>293</sup> On the white mob actions of September 23 at Little Rock's Central High School that led to the use of 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne and federalization of Arkansas's National Guard, see, Nichols, *A Matter of Justice: Eisenhower and the Beginning of the Civil Rights Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 195-196, and Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 127-128; the key events of Eisenhower's intervention can be followed in Nichols, *A Matter of Justice*, Chapters 8 and 9, and Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, Chapter 4.

notwithstanding.” Further, they held the use of the Army to be, “obnoxious to every principle for which we fought and [an act which] threatens the people of this Republic with a future existence similar to that of the unfortunate Hungarians.” Legionnaires drew upon gender and patriotism in a way that called into question the manhood of both the President and the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division, through an assertion of their own manliness. “We would suffer the consequences of refusing to obey our commanding officer rather than prod defenseless girls into an integrated school with bare bayonets.”<sup>294</sup> The potential for mutiny and rebellion against the commander-in-chief, and the nation’s laws, in this instance, is justified in the name of the manly protection of southern womanhood. Defiance of both the President and the Supreme Court were reworked as a patriotic defense of the nation against a communist-style subjugation of the American people that Khrushchev himself would find pleasing.

An Alabama Legion report, forwarded to national commander John Gleason in early October 1957, summarizing resolutions “unanimously” adopted by affiliated posts to express their “outraged feelings” over Eisenhower’s intervention in Little Rock, struck similar themes. Post members mixed representations of their wartime sacrifices and presidential denigration of the democratic system, to justify their massive resistance to federal authority. They rested much of the presumed legitimacy of their case upon their previous war duty. “The posts...are composed solely of men who have served honorably with pride in the armed forces of the United States, having offered their lives on the altar of sacrifice in time of war, and so are well qualified to speak”. From their vantage point, the President’s actions undermined the

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<sup>294</sup> For the text of these parts of the 5<sup>th</sup> District’s protest, see news clipping, *Birmingham Post Herald*, October 2, 1957, in AL Records, Microfilm, 89-2036, Reel 22E11, Subject Files, file: Americanism-Tolerance, Segregation,” ALLA.

very system they, and their fellow soldiers, fought and died for under his wartime command of them. “The President has now arbitrarily perverted the ordinary mission of the armed forces of these United States by using them against their fellow citizens in one of the Sovereign States.” In this sense they were not wrong. The President’s actions did assault the old system of states’ rights and the racial order it upheld, and from their perspective, this was the society that they went to war to protect. In this representation, they also depicted themselves, and Little Rock’s citizens opposing desegregation, as the president’s victims, eliding the lawlessness of the white mobs, whose rioting openly defied the Supreme Court’s authority. While the posts did not call outright for a boycott on military service, they certainly hinted at it. “The spectacle of men in American uniforms using gun-butt and bayonet against their fellow American citizens so shocks the sensibilities of those who have served in the these same armed forces that a further willingness to serve therein is seriously compromised.” The emphasis they placed on “men in American uniforms,” and the images of force in repressing resistance, suggested that the troops acted in a manner not consistent with American democratic ideals, but more like a brutal, and alien, Iron Curtain army. For all these reasons, the post declared, “the present use of the armed forces should be discontinued forthwith, and...no such future use should ever be made again except upon the direct request of the Chief Executive or Legislature of the affected Sovereign State.”<sup>295</sup> As the administration demonstrated its commitment to enforcing Supreme Court desegregation mandates, Legionnaires mobilized

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<sup>295</sup> John H. Wienand, Jr. Department Commander, American Legion, Department of Alabama to John Gleason, National Commander, October 4, 1957, AL Records, M-Film, 89-2036, Reel 22E11, Subject Files, file: Americanism—Tolerance, Segregation, ALLA; Gleason replied with only, “I am in receipt of your letter dated October 4, and I have duly noted the sentiments expressed, Gleason to Wienand, October 8, 1957, Ibid., ALLA.

conservative Americanism discourse to resist them. In short, their conservative Americanism authorized their argument for the continuance of racial inequality under the status-quo regime of states' rights.

A number of Legion posts kept the focus on states' rights while decrying the use of force as facilitating an un-American system of governance. Veterans of Williston, South Carolina Legion Post 75 labeled the federal use of troops, "unnecessary, uncalled for, and a gross violation to the sovereignty of any state." The intervention disrupted the otherwise well-ordered social system based on states' rights and segregation. Post 20 of Plain, Dealing, Louisiana, for example, in a resolution it sent to Eisenhower, maintained, "this highhanded enforcement method is productive of the most chaotic condition ever known in our Republic, which condition is vividly characterized by the bayonet-pointed ruthlessness of the soldiers under your command." The post blamed Eisenhower for the social turmoil in Little Rock, not the defiance of the mobs and the system they defended, in its demand that he, "immediately countermand the orders which brought about this disruption and disharmony and withdraw all federal troops from the city of Little Rock...de-federalize the National Guard...and return the Guard to the State of Arkansas." In stipulating their demands for the restoration of states' rights, "as members of this post and as Citizens [sic] of these United States," they underscored the reality that, within the terms of their Americanism, only they as whites were true citizens, and that federal intervention disrupted that entire social construct. In this sense, integration itself constituted an un-American act for attempting to undermine a governing system based upon white citizen rule. Carter Burdell Hagler Post 178 (Augusta, GA), in a

telegram it sent national commander Dan Daniel on the morning troops surrounded Central High, protested the Army's presence, and the federalizing of the National Guard, "as constituting an illegal and unconstitutional interference with and invasion of the sovereign rights of the state of Arkansas." Further, it warned, these actions "must ultimately lead to the establishment of a dictatorship in this country." Posts 525 and 97 (Danville, VA), the later Dan Daniel's "home post," focused on, "The unwarranted and brutal use of force...resulting in bodily injury to unarmed American citizens." Adding further to the image of Iron Curtain-style repression, they decried, "The invasion of private property, the unlawful detention of citizens held incommunicado without charges, the use of massed bayonets against innocent children, the arrogation of civilian school authority by the military commander." To Americans familiar with "Day Under Communism" events, such as the one organized by the Legion in Mosinee (WS) in early 1950 to show townspeople what life would be like under Soviet rule,<sup>296</sup> (let alone the real Soviet suppression of the Hungarian revolt in 1956) this representation recalled its scariest elements.

The resolution passed by Legion Post 1 in Jackson, Mississippi to protest the Little Rock intervention, asserted the legitimacy of its conservative Americanism protest by invoking memories of sacrificing citizen-warriors, while also hinting at a

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<sup>296</sup> Resolution, American Legion Post #75, Williston, South Carolina, enclosure in S.T. McClain, Post Adjutant to American Legion Headquarters, October 9, 1957, AL Records, M-Film, 89-2036, Reel 22E11, Subject Files, file: Americanism—Tolerance, Segregation, ALLA; O.S. McFatter, Commander, and J. Keeth Adjutant, Roach-Straryhan-Holland American Legion Post 20, Plain Dealing, (LS) to The Honorable Dwight D. Eisenhower, President of the United States, September 27, 1957, Ibid., ALLA; Telegram, F.M. Davis Adjutant and Executive Committee, Carter Burdell Hagler Post 178, Augusta, GA, to Commander Daniels September 25, 1957, Ibid. ALLA; on the Danville posts, *The Virginia Legionnaire*, November 1957, 1. For a discussion of the mock communist takeover in Mosinee (WS), staged on May Day, 1950, as the "Day Under Communism", see Chapter 4 in, Richard M. Fried, *The Russians Are Coming!, The Russians Are Coming!: Pageantry and Patriotism in Cold-War America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.)

boycott of the military's recruitment efforts. While noting the Legion's patriotic support of a "strong military force for the defense of our Country," the resolution warned, "unless the Federal Government desists in its present action...it is the feeling of this post consisting of approximately 2,000 veterans who prided themselves on being a part of the Citizen Army of World War I, World War II, and the Korean Conflict, that future enlistments in the military forces will decrease with far reaching and dangerous results to our military efficiency needed in defense of our Country." While such an act in any circumstances, but especially in Cold War times, could be seen as traitorous, from their perspective, "an act which endangers the sovereign rights of all States to govern...and control their own internal affairs," meant that it was not rebellion, but the necessary defense of "the United States Constitution."<sup>297</sup>

In October 1957 the Mississippi Legion issued a racially inflammatory editorial directed at Eisenhower that also accused the President's Little Rock intervention of fostering the Soviet cause. "You have once again played right into Red hands, Ike, by stirring up a mess of racial hatred, using Federal force to cram a minority opinion down the throats of a majority. The people of Hungary must wonder now if this isn't the reason why they didn't get any help from us—that you were planning all the time to do the same thing to the South that Russia did to them." It also turned the administration's Cold War civil rights propaganda against his actions. "Ike gets on TV, after being instructed by Brownell as to what to say, and after being instructed by Robert Montgomery as to how to stand, look, and how to say it, then Ike says, in effect, 'This situation in Little Rock is giving much comfort to Moscow.'

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<sup>297</sup>For this resolution, adopted October 10, 1957, by Henry H. Graves Post 1, Jackson (MS) see *The Mississippi Veteran*, November 1957, 6.

Yep, Ike, it sure is but who is giving the most comfort to Moscow—Faibus by calling out the Guard to prevent violence or you by sending in Federal troops who started violent action by beating people over the head, sticking them with bayonets and locking up people without charges?” This satiric representation of Eisenhower as being in need of prepping by others to make his speech, received further comment in the editorial’s attack on African Americans who supported his intervention. “[A]s he sits at the bar on the 19<sup>th</sup> hole and reads the congratulatory messages from such Red-tinged morons as Loose-Lipped [Lena] Horne, Liver-Lipped [Louis] Armstrong, and Has-Been Robinson, we can’t help but wonder if he really knows what’s going on.” It also presented Little Rock as but the latest episode in a long string of incompetent sell-outs to the enemy. “Ole Ike has done it again. Once again he has played into the hands of the Reds, just like he played right into the hands of the Germans at the ‘Blunder of the Bulge,’ and just like he played right into the hands of the Reds when he held us up at the Elbe river and let them take Berlin, and just like he let the Red-ridden N.A.A.C. talk him into pushing a so-called Civil Rights bill through Congress, and just like he played into Red hands when he appointed Warren to the Supreme Court, and just like he played right into Red hands when he condemned Senator Joe McCarthy.”<sup>298</sup> The bumbling chief executive appears as unfit to command in peace, as he allegedly was in war.

#### Anger among Birmingham, Alabama’s veterans over the Little Rock

intervention spilled over into the city’s 1957 Veterans’ Day festivities. While the

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<sup>298</sup> See the editorial, “The Reds Are Laughing Like Hell...!” *Mississippi Veteran*, October, 1957, 1. For examples of statements by administration officials expressing their concerns over the harm done to the United States by the use of Little Rock in Soviet propaganda, their efforts to counter it in Eisenhower’s speech to the nation, and the speech’s relevant parts addressing these concerns, see Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 130-133.

Veterans Day committee coordinating the ceremonies invited Army Chief of Staff General Maxwell Taylor to speak at the “world peace” luncheon, they suddenly cancelled his appearance at the event. In early November, 1957, directly quoting a report from the *Birmingham News*, the *Washington Post & Times Herald* reported that the committee, “in view of the procedure at Little Rock and related subsequent developments elsewhere—found it advisable to alter...its original plans for the celebration.” Also, this report stated, “it was decided by the committee not to invite the Regular Army units to participate.” This outcome points to both the desire of the segregationist veterans to affront Eisenhower by proxy, and at the same time, by leaving the U.S. Army out, they further reinforced their message about defending states’ rights.<sup>299</sup>

Another issue concerned ongoing dissatisfaction, “at the use of integrated regular Army units, and a mixed WAC band which had appeared in the parade here in past years.” The committee also secured American Legion national commander John Gleason as General Taylor’s replacement.<sup>300</sup> As this episode reveals, Little Rock implied desegregation everywhere in the civilian world, just as it occurred within the military community under Eisenhower. In short, by banishing the administration from Birmingham’s Veterans Day, Alabama’s veterans signaled their sense that Little Rock and desegregation of the military betrayed and dishonored what their Americanism stood for, the perpetuation of white racial dominance under state

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<sup>299</sup> Washington Post & Times Herald November 1, 1957, A3.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

sovereignty. In substituting for General Taylor, Gleason once again signaled the Legion's endorsement of states' rights.

African-American Legionnaires challenged the meanings white veterans ascribed to Little Rock when white New Orleans Legionnaires invited Governor Faubus to speak at their 1<sup>st</sup> District 1957 Veterans' Day ceremonies. For his role as a staunch defender of states' rights and racial segregation, Faubus emerged in the South as a role model for politicians in other states and jurisdictions resisting federal integration mandates. The day before the ceremony, Leon S. Edwards, commander of the Nelson Harper Post 554 Algiers, (LS), a black unit, wired national commander Gleason, stating that, "the members...object to Governor Orval Faubus appearing as guest speaker of the American Legion." As Edwards explained, "Because it is nationally, and internationally known that his conduct in defiance to the order of the court and law of the land in the Central High School...matter. We do not believe that his conduct has been in conformity with our basic democratic system of government nor the constitution of the of the American Legion."<sup>301</sup>

Another black unit, Albert Dalcour Post 555, in New Orleans, wrote Gleason shortly after the event to "protest very strongly against the sponsorship of ...Faubus." As the unit's commander Esau Rollins stated, "Governor Faubus is a controversial

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<sup>301</sup> The identification of this event as a Legion 1<sup>st</sup> District project is in, Esau J. Rollins, Commander, Albert Dalcour Post 555, New Orleans, LS to John S. Gleason, Jr., National Commander American Legion, November 16, 1957, AL Records, M-Film, 89-2036, Reel 22E11, Subject Files, file: Americanism—Tolerance, Segregation, ALLA; Telegram, Leon S. Edwards, Commander, Nelson Harper Post 554, Algiers LS to Gleason, November, 10, 1957, M-Film, 89-2036, file: Americanism—Tolerance, Segregation, ALLA; for Post 554's standing as a black unit, see "Application for Post Charter," Nelson Harper Post 554, Algiers, LS, dated April 16, 1949, in Charter File, American Legion Headquarters, Indianapolis, IN, (hereinafter: AL HQ). On Faubus as a role model of southern defiance, see Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 416; and, Andrew J. Dunar, *America in the Fifties* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 220.

figure. One who defied the Chief-Executive Dwight D. Eisenhower, president of these great United States.” Rollins emphasized that the members did not want Faubus to appear at another Legion function. “We urge you to take positive steps in the right direction so there would not be any recurrence o[f] similar incidents.” Faubus, as the *Chicago Defender* reported, spoke on Veterans Day, “from a platform in front of New Orleans brand new City Hall.” The paper lamented the presence of two African-American members of Post 555’s auxiliary (to meet their unit’s service quota,) but noted, “absent were Negro members of the American Legion and particularly the heads of the two posts in New Orleans.” Rollins’s objection to Faubus cited specific provisions in the Legion constitution against “purely political” activity by units in identifying its infraction,<sup>302</sup> while Edwards’s more general comment in this regard may have been more about its democratic ideals. In highlighting the power prestige of presidential authority in the Little Rock crisis, the greatness of the nation, and the harm Faubus inflicted on American democracy in defying the Court, black Legionnaires were asserting their claims to equal citizenship rights within a new liberal postwar order they had sacrificed for in battle. Further, by having Faubus speak at the new city hall, one still firmly in occupied segregationist territory, white Legionnaires asserted their segregationist notion of the postwar social order based on

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<sup>302</sup>Rollins to Gleason, November 16, 1957, AI Records, M-Film, 89-2036, file: Americanism—Tolerance, Segregation, Ibid., ALLA; for identification of Post 555 as a black unit, see, “Application for Post Charter,” Albert Dalcour Post 555, New Orleans, LS, dated March 24, 1949, in Charter File, AL, HQ; *Chicago Defender*, November 30, 1957, 3; Rollins (Ibid.) specifically objected to Faubus’s invitation as a violation of Article II, Section 2, of the Legion’s national constitution, which states, “The American Legion should be absolutely non-political and shall not be used for the dissemination of partisan principles nor the promotion of the candidacy of any person seeking public officer or preferment.” Section 2 also prohibited candidates and elected officials from holding salaried positions in the Legion, but with the proviso, “Provided that members of post, department or national standing or special committee shall not be affected.” *National Constitution and By-Laws of the American Legion*, Revised October, 1955, 3.

racial hierarchy and subordinate citizenship for non-whites. To the black membership, Faubus represented the antithesis of the world they desired. His presence on the platform insulted a day devoted to the memory of their past and present sacrifices for freedom. Through their boycott of the event, black veterans asserted their belief in a new day of racial equality—their liberal Americanism.

The AVC reinforced these aspirations from the very start of the Little Rock crisis. On September 4, Faubus used the Arkansas National Guard to prevent the black high school students from entering Central High while white mobs simultaneously perpetrated acts of physical and verbal terror. The AVC wired Eisenhower, “within hours,” urging him to withdraw federal support from the Guard units as long as Faubus used them as instruments of defiance. The group also suggested the President a rationale for the proposed action, noting that the AVC “realizes that National Guard units are under the direction and control of the Governors of the various states, yet at the same time, the Federal Government contributes to the housing, equipment, and finances of these units.” Earlier in January, the AVC called upon the President to act against increased anti-civil rights violence in the South. Americans across the country listened to CBS radio discussing the AVC’s message. The group’s September 4 message to Eisenhower also deployed Cold War civil rights discourse. “Our friends in the free world and the non-communists behind the Iron Curtain who look to us for leadership must be completely disillusioned when they hear of federally supported troops being used as they are in Arkansas.” Also noting upcoming meetings (“within 5 days”) at the United Nations, “to consider the Russian suppression of the Hungarian people when they were

attempting to secure a greater measure of freedom,” the group declared, “It would be tragic if the world was reading of the continued suppression of civil rights in Arkansas by federally supported troops.” In what was apparently a different message to Eisenhower, the AVC called upon him to end his golfing trip and resume command of the situation at the White House, since “the pictures of the President playing golf while the mobs were active in Little Rock provided, ‘devastating’ weapons in the hands of enemy propagandists.”<sup>303</sup>

In calling for an end to federal aid to the Guard, the AVC focused attention on its actions under Faubus. The group argued that the Guard, and other units like it, undercut government progress, “in doing away with segregation and in increasing civil rights in the nation.” Pointing to the recent passage of the Civil Rights bill as “the will of the people on civil rights,” the group argued that the presence of troops acting to suppress these goals frustrated that will, and their belief in the legitimacy of federal authority. “Our people will lose faith in a government, which on the one hand, seems to support civil rights, while on the other hand, it continues to recognize troops who are being used to deny civil rights.” The solution in part, entailed retraining the Arkansas National Guard because, “The Governor...by his actions has negated all of the training the Guard may have received by giving official blessing in the minds of the members of the Guard that defiance of the law of the land is moral and correct.” The training AVC envisioned, which it termed “a vital phase...of proper mental

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<sup>303</sup> “Vets Urge President Remove Federal Support From Arkansas National Guard,” September 4, 1957, MS 2144, AVC Records, Ser. 3, Press Releases, box 79, folder 6, 1955-1959, GL; on the speed of the AVC’s move to contact Eisenhower, *AVC Bulletin*, September 1957, 1; for events of September 4 in Little Rock, Nichols, *A Matter of Justice*, 172-173, on CBS’s coverage of the AVC’s Guard position, *AVC Bulletin*, September 1957, 1; for the AVC’s earlier call for Eisenhower to act in halting southern violence, *AVC Bulletin*, January, 1957, 3; *AVC Bulletin*, September 1957, 3.

conditioning and orientation,” would provide an, “understanding of American philosophy and tradition.” In making these proposals, the group also pointed out that, “The National Guard is trained by Army officers as an integral part of our military forces so that it can instantly be ready for action to serve any place in the world in case of a national emergency.”<sup>304</sup>

The AVC also roundly denounced the June 21, 1958 ruling by Arkansas federal Judge Harry J. Lemley (a Faubus ally) authorizing a halt to federal desegregation orders in Little Rock Central High School for 2 ½ years. The AVC termed the ruling, “a judicial kneeling to hoodlumism.” But the group pointed to another reason why the decision fit this definition. It also viewed the Lemley ruling as a betrayal of “the constitutional guarantee of equal protection of the laws.” As the *Bulletin* explained, “just as the 1896 Plessy decision gave lip service to the constitutional command of equality, but destroyed it under the guise of ‘but separate,’ so the Lemley order acknowledges the Supreme Court’s order but subverts it by asserting that ‘the time for the enjoyment of that right has not yet come.’” To the AVC, Lemley merely facilitated massive resistance since, “Judge Lemley’s order is clearly cut from the same cloak that the southern-diehard have woven to smother the constitution in the fog of dawdling, delay, and defiance.” Hoping for a just outcome in Little Rock, the group angrily denounced Lemley’s ruling, “In this great struggle between constitutional morality and law, on the one hand, and blind prejudice and civil disorder on the other, AVC must not falter from its historic and traditional insistence that the Constitution means what it says and means it now. We reject the slogan of gradualism. We are not against orderly progress, but we shall not condone

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<sup>304</sup> *AVC Bulletin*, September, 1957, 3.

or acquiesce in the distortion of ‘deliberate speed’ into a program of neverism. AVC will continue in the vanguard of those who work for full enjoyment of constitutional rights for all, now and in the future.’<sup>305</sup> This representation rejected attacks on Eisenhower, the civil rights movement and the troops as forces of subversion. Instead Eisenhower and the forces for racial change stood on the side of “morality and law” the opposition upheld immorality and illegality. While the segregationists created “civil disorder”, Lemley’s ruling abetted their efforts to subvert the Constitution and facilitated a government of states’ rights reliant on mob rule.

The contest to control the symbolism of Little Rock took another turn at the start of 1958. On January 25 the Arkansas Legion presented Governor Faubus with its Americanism Award in Little Rock. The top Legionnaires attending the ceremony included National Legion vice-commander Harry Miller of Fayetteville, West, Virginia, Dr. Garland Murphy of Little Rock, and former national commander Erle Coker, Jr. Coker, born in Dawson, Georgia, also served on the states’ slate of Democratic National Committee delegates committed to the 1952 presidential candidacy of Senator Richard B. Russell, Georgia’s powerful segregationist. Coker’s father, Erle Sr., president of Fulton National Bank in Atlanta, served as Russell’s national campaign treasurer that year. When Eisenhower sent the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne to Little Rock, Russell had dubbed them, “Hitler’s storm troopers.” Erle Coker Jr. personally handed Faubus his Americanism plaque during the ceremony. The next day, however, the AVC conferred its Americanism Award on the group of children who braved the mobs to enter Central High, known as the “Little Rock Nine.” The

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<sup>305</sup> *AVC Bulletin*, July-August, 1958, 2; on the specifics of Judge Lemley’s order, Nichols, *A Matter of Justice*, 222-224.

AVC initially announced its award in late October 1957. In reporting the ceremony, also held in Little Rock, the January *Bulletin* noted that, “Some observers here reported that actually the Legion action was a last minute effort to offset the favorable publicity that was being given to the AVC Award to the students.” Each student received a citation, stating the basis for the award, which the national board unanimously approved at its fall meeting, which read, “For helping to make democracy work by resisting the un-American and undemocratic violence in Little Rock and by continuing attendance at school in face of such violence and at great personal sacrifice.” The inscription bore the language of a battlefield citation for heroic, meritorious service. AVC National Chairman, William Ming, Jr. and Chat Peterson, Americanism Committee chairman, presented the awards to the Little Rock Nine, while one of them, Terrence Roberts spoke for his classmates. Mrs. Lois Patillo spoke for the children’s parents. Other important figures at the ceremony included, Mrs. Daisy Bates, “leader of the Arkansas NAACP,” cited by the *Bulletin* for her “major contribution in arranging and preparing the meeting.” During the event she received “a bouquet of roses” from Harvey C. Ray, one of the children’s fathers. The Reverend Dunbar Ogden, of the Ministerial Alliance also attended. In all, “More than 1,400 jammed into the Methodist Church where the ceremonies were held.”<sup>306</sup>

The AVC purposively selected January 26 for the ceremony because that also marked its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In early September 1958, William Ming spoke to the

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<sup>306</sup> On the identification of the top Legionnaires present at the award ceremony, *AVC Bulletin*, February, 1958, 1. For Cocke’s background, Legion service, and he and his father’s work for Russell, *New York Times*, October 13, 1950, 16; *Ibid.*, June 17, 1952, 20, and *Ibid.*, March 19, 1952, 16. The AVC’s award ceremony is described in *AVC Bulletin*, January, 1958, 1; for prior announcement of the AVC award and the inscription on the citations, *Washington Post & Times Herald*, October 22, 1957, B10, and *AVC Bulletin*, December 1957, 3.

AVC's Springfield (MA) Chapter on the topic, "The Desegregation Decision Four Years Later." During a press conference he lambasted the Arkansas Legion for recognizing Faubus with its Americanism Award. In his speech to the chapter, Ming noted, "This action...was an insult to the millions of Americans who seek equality of educational opportunity after too long a period of denial."<sup>307</sup> For the AVC then, the ceremony served to highlight the actions of the Little Rock Nine as a representation of its core mission with respect to race and civil rights.

Outside the Deep South, local American Legion units continued to support efforts to undermine school desegregation. In late September 1959, Virginia's Warren County Educational Foundation, which established a parallel system of private classrooms so that parents could avoid sending their children to the newly desegregated public schools, began its second school year. While students in grades nine through twelve convened class at the Virginia Gentlemen's Club and Restaurant, eight graders met "at the American Legion Hall." At its late summer 1957 convention, the Illinois Department defeated a resolution the *Chicago Defender* characterized as, "a simple civil rights resolution condemning racial segregation in schools and other areas of cultural contacts." As the paper reported, even after past department commander Irving Breakstone asked delegates to "stand up and be counted as Americans" and approve his, "much watered down version of the original resolution, it too, ran into a thunderous 'no' vote." The paper denounced the Legion for this action. "This is the flag-waving, drum beating 'super-patriotic' organization which avails itself of every opportunity to deny democracy to the American Negro."

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<sup>307</sup> On the selection of January 26 to also commemorate the AVC's anniversary, *AVC Bulletin*, December, 1957, 3; for Ming's speech, *AVC Bulletin*, September, 1958, 4.

It also attacked the Legion for having abandoned the values of previous generations of America's soldiers. "Have they forgotten 'Over There' in Flanders field where many of their buddies still lie buried and where poppies no longer grow to adorn their graves? Have they forgotten the doughboys, as they were then called, who died to save democracy?" The *Defender* declared that the rejection "makes a mockery of true Americanism."<sup>308</sup>

The Legion's September 1958 national convention approved an Americanism Committee resolution committing the organization to "vigorously oppose all legislation" in Congress that would take away state and local control of the public schools. A clear stand for states' rights in public education matters, the resolution also pledged the Legion to oppose federal financial ties to the schools except in "certain operational programs of federal agencies," and "specialized or restricted programs of a temporary duration, or during time of war or grave national emergency." One clause was a lurid expression of conservative Cold War Americanism language. "Such federal domination and intervention would make possible centralized thought control, propagandized and collectivized captives of our children, and the ultimate destruction of our constitutional form of government." At this same convention, the Americanism Committee turned down resolution 409, which the *Chicago Defender* noted, "would have put the powerful veterans' organization on record as advocating a stronger civil rights law." The Americanism Committee kept the resolution from a floor vote because in calling for Congress to "implement" the Supreme Court's desegregation

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<sup>308</sup> On Warren County, *New York Times*, September 25, 1959, 19; on the Illinois Department's convention action see the editorial, "Legion Against Civil Rights", *Chicago Defender* August 7, 1957, 11; and on Breakstone's effort, *Chicago Defender*, August 5, 1957, 7.

rulings, “it was not procedurally correct” and “not germane to the programs and purposes of The [sic] American Legion.”<sup>309</sup> In the late 1950s, while Legion facilities in pro-segregation states had become platforms for massive resistance to school integration, the national convention, by accommodating states’ rights interests sanctioned these activities.

During his early 1956 tour of the South to investigate conditions confronting the region’s black veterans, Mickey Levine photographed two images from Mississippi, which were later published side-by-side in the *AVC Bulletin*. The image on the left was a photograph of the railroad station at Mound Bayou, “an all-Negro town,” which nevertheless lacked a waiting facility for blacks. The other photograph featured a portion of Greenville’s “Tribute to War Veterans,” a memorial consisting, in part, of a bill board-like panel which, in large letters, displayed the message: “May the spirit of our boys who fell in battle live forever.” The *Bulletin’s* caption regarding the memorial observed, “Its wording takes on a strange hue in light of the failure of the South to treat Negro veterans with equality.”<sup>310</sup> While this observation reflected the AVC’s allegiance to the goal of racial equality, both the railway station and the memorial stood as symbols of the inability of the forces of liberal Americanism to defeat the Legion’s southern nationalists. Although the efforts of the AVC, black Legionnaires and their allies to put forth their reform program further disrupts the

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<sup>309</sup> For the resolution, No.567, submitted by the Texas Department, *Proceedings, 40<sup>th</sup> National Convention, American Legion, Chicago, Illinois*, September, 1-4, 1958, published as *House Document, No. 40*, 86<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 61-62. As it stated, “Under our Constitution each state is, and should be, vested with complete, sole and final power, authority, direction, supervision and control of every facet of public education within its borders, with the largest possible measure of home rule and autonomy delegated to the local communities.” Ibid. For Resolution No. 409, introduced by Illinois in an apparent turnaround from the previous convention ,see, *Proceedings, 40<sup>th</sup> National Convention*, Ibid., 66; and, *Chicago Defender* (Daily Edition), September 4, 1958, 2A.

<sup>310</sup> *AVC Bulletin*, March, 1956, 3.

notion of an unchallenged conservative patriotic culture in this period, the conjunction of anti-radical, states' rights and segregationist interests among southern white Legionnaires and their allies elsewhere in the national organization proved to be too powerful to overcome. The Mound Bayou railway station effaced the notion of blacks as full citizens. For southern white Legionnaires, the Greenville memorial was, undoubtedly, never meant to give recognition to the sacrifices of fallen African American soldiers. To have actually done so, would have given authority to their living comrades' claims for citizenship rights that were being denied to them, and their fellow civilians, at the railway station, and throughout the South. As the 1950s ended, the national Legion took an important step forward on race matters within its structure, but change remained limited in the years ahead, even as the civil rights movement removed many of the formal barriers to equality.

## Chapter 7: “All good Legionnaires know that a bullet has no racial or religious discrimination.” The Society of the 40 & 8 Controversy and the Limits of Racial Reform in the American Legion

Despite the power of segregationist forces within the Legion, the close of the 1950s nevertheless did witness one important shift in the organization’s policy regarding race. In 1959, following several years of growing controversy and debate, the national Legion officially severed its organizational ties to its long-established affiliate, the Society of the 40 & 8, over the unit’s refusal to eliminate its rule restricting membership to white veterans. The black press and other important national voices of liberal Americanism seeking to advance civil rights applauded the Legion’s policy change. But the AVC excoriated the group for its failure to end its toleration of racial inequality by abolishing segregation in the 40 & 8, and within its own organizational structure. The limited extent of racial reform that occurred within the nation’s largest veterans’ organization at the end of the decade, further highlights the inability of liberal Cold War Americanism to engender more far-reaching change in a conservative era.

Officially named *La Societe des Quarante Hommes et Huit Chevaux*, the unit formed in 1921 as an “elite” unit of veterans existing within the national body. The designations “40 & 8” referred to a type of French railroad car used during WWI which had the capacity to transport either forty men or eight horses. The whites only membership clause in the group’s constitution existed from its inception. In the interwar years the 40 & 8 centered its activities on widow and orphan relief, and recruiting members for the national Legion. By 1923 it had over 24,000 members in

600 chapters in all but three states. In 1925 the group moved its offices from Seattle Washington to the Legion's headquarters in Indianapolis. In the interwar years the 40 & 8 centered its activities on providing relief to widows and orphans of deceased servicemen, and recruiting members for the national Legion. Previously existing as an independent unit, in 1937 the group became "a subsidiary" organization of the Legion, that, as discussed earlier, did not itself bar membership on the basis of race. During WWII it shipped thousands of cases of playing cards to troops overseas. To help alleviate the shortage of nurses after the war, in 1946 it established a Nurses' Training Program that became a national program in the mid-1950s. The group also functioned as the Legion's "fun-making" group for the pranks and other acts of merriment its members performed at national conventions, especially during parades, such as "romping around the streets in diapers." In 1954, the 40 & 8 had a national membership of some 70, 000, which included WWII and Korean War veterans.<sup>311</sup>

In the early 1950s the 40 & 8 came under increasing criticism by a number of Legionnaires, especially African Americans, who wanted the racial restriction repealed. In July 1951, the Samuel Dowd Post in Yonkers (NY), an all-black unit,

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<sup>311</sup> For aspects of the group's interwar activities, see the pamphlet *La Societe des Hommes et Chevaux*, n.d., File: 40 & 8 miscellaneous, drawer 10, Pamphlet Files, American Legion Library and Archives (ALLA) Indianapolis, IN; for the information regarding the 40 & 8 during WWII and 1950s, see *Information Manual, La Societe des 40 Hommes et 8 Chevaux*, 2003, Pamphlet Files, Ibid. War service alone did not qualify one for membership in the 40& 8. Instead, candidates for membership had to be chosen by the Society on the basis of their exemplary service to the Legion. Ibid. The *New York Times* also described 40 & 8 as "an exclusive inter-organization group of 'elite' veterans and influential veterans." See *New York Times*, July 15, 1951, 24. On 40 & 8's subsidiary status, Ibid., December 1, 1959, 23; and Ibid., December 5, 1959, 1. For the naming of the group based upon the transport capacity of WWI French rail cars, and its founding 1921 constitutional provision restricting membership to "male, white members," see Ibid., July 31, 1954, 1. For some years, the 40 & 8 wielded considerable influence in the national Legion. As *Time* also reported, "a Forty & Eight clique...had pretty much its own way in dictating the choice of Legion national commander." The unit's political influence was challenged, however, by the Legion's "Kingmakers" faction in the mid-1950s, led by James Ringley of the Illinois Department. "Kingmakers and Fun Lovers," *Time*, July 11, 1955, 20. On the unit's "fun-making" functions, *Time*, Ibid., 20. For 40 & 8's national membership in 1954, *New York Times*, July 31, 1954, 1.

succeeded in winning the Westchester County Legion convention's approval to repeal the ban. Of the 200 delegates voting, "only two or three responded with shouted 'nays'." Delegates also approved a resolution "advocating immediate internment of all Communists and Communist supporters in this country." The Dowd unit's resolution interpreted the Legion's conservative Americanism as consistent with the idea of racial equality. "One of the purposes of the American Legion is its uncompromising fight for 100% Americanism and an unqualified condemnation of any force in the national life that advocates the doctrine of racial or religious superiority... There are many members who are not Caucasians but who work untiringly for the promotion of the principles, program, and ideals of the American Legion."<sup>312</sup>

Internal opposition to 40 & 8's racial restriction opened up elsewhere. The Legion's Illinois Department convention in July 1951, with its 12,000 plus delegates attending, approved a resolution, which drew upon Cold War discourse, calling for the race bar's "elimination." As the *Chicago Defender* reported, "the resolution... condemns the use of restrictive clauses as lending assistance to the spread of communism." The group also resolved to forward the resolution "to the national body." Likewise, in mid-1953 the Ohio Department's convention voted, "to urge the national Legion to erase [the] color line that keeps Negroes from membership in the 40 & 8."<sup>313</sup>

Opposition among other Legion affiliates intensified in the mid-1950s. In July 1954, the New York State Legion convention approved a "strongly worded"

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<sup>312</sup> Samuel Dowd Post's resolution, along with the anti-radical resolution and the convention's vote, are in *New York Times*, July 1951, 24.

<sup>313</sup> *Chicago Defender* September 15, 1951, 1; *New York Times*, July 26, 1953, 12.

resolution calling for the national Legion to “abolish” the 48 & 8, “unless it prohibited ‘discrimination of any race, creed or color.’” This action followed passage of a resolution by the New York state 40 & 8’s meeting, consisting of some 600 members, against “Legion control.” At their August 1955 convention, New York State Legion delegates voted down a resolution calling for the placement of 40 & 8 under the control of the Legion’s National Executive Committee, while “[t]he resolutions committee tabled a motion calling for an official Legion policy of obedience to the Supreme Court order on school desegregation.” But at its 1956 convention, in “an overwhelming voice vote,” the group “demanded” that 40 & 8 remove its race bar. New York State Attorney General Jacob Javits, a member of AVC and the Legion, informed this same meeting that, “the national veterans organizations themselves can render a great service by being absolutely sure that in their own organization and structure there is no vestige of discrimination or segregation anywhere in the country.” Meanwhile, 500 Hawaii Department delegates meeting at their July 1955 convention “voted to disown the local Forty-and-Eight Society because of its racial policies.” In a state in which only 15 percent of its residents were white, the 40 & 8 unit consisted of only 60 members. Following the Hawaii Department’s action, the unit reported its intentions to “possibly petition the national [40 & 8] group to eliminate its race clause.” Its state president even told the *New York Times*, “We certainly agree that the...racial discrimination should be dropped.”<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> *New York Times*, 31, 1954, 1, *Ibid.*, August 8, 1955, 14; *Ibid.*, July 28, 1956, 19. On the Hawaii Department, *Ibid.*, July 18, 1955, 3.

As the example of the all-black Samuel Dowd Post reveals, these various convention actions, in part, represented the determined efforts of the Legion's African-American membership to keep 40& 8's membership restriction squarely before their fellow white veterans. In May 1951, the *Chicago Defender* reported on the work of the Johnny Baker Post, an African-American unit, "which has sent a letter to every Negro post on its mailing list, urging attack on the Forty and Eight ban". The paper also noted that, "[f]or years this last stand of those who in earlier days of [the] America Legion organization sought to bar Negro membership entirely, has been under constant though unorganized attack by Negro Legion groups throughout the nation." As the language of the Illinois Department's 1951 resolution reveals, the influence of Cold War discourse and concerns helps to explain the growing interests of whites in ending the racial ban and the increasing leverage which they, black Legionnaires and their liberal allies exerted in making the case for reform. Cold War discourse also came directly to the Legion's convention floor by way of some of its most notable guests and officials within its leadership. In a speech epitomizing liberal Americanism's call for national Cold War unity, presidential candidate Dwight Eisenhower told delegates at the Legion's 1952 convention, "[L]et us once and for all resolve that henceforth we shall be guided in our relations with our fellows by the American creed that all men are created equal—and remain equal. All of us who salute the flag, whatever our color or creed or place of birth, are Americans entitled to the full rights and privileges of our citizenship. In a time when America needs all the skills, all the spiritual strength and dedicated services of its 155 million people, discrimination is criminally stupid." At the October 1955 convention Legionnaires

did not hear Eisenhower speak (whom they termed, “their old comrade at arms,”) because of the president’s recent heart attack. Instead, they “stood in silence for one minute of prayer for [his] ‘speedy recovery’.” But delegates did hear “a plea,” from staunch anti-communist and AFL-CIO president George Meany, who asked “that they work hard to eliminate race and labor discrimination as ‘flaws’ in our national defense.”” Also, in an April, 1954 address before the New York State Legion’s annual national commanders’ dinner, national commander Arthur J. Connell, “Asserting that the communists seek to sow suspicion and manufacture differences...condemned racial and religious prejudice as ‘serving the enemy’s cause as surely as the soldier in the Red Army.’”<sup>315</sup>

Yet in spite of these messages, many Legionnaires remained unwilling to vanquish the 40 & 8 race ban, as their “old comrade at arms” would have them do. In 1953, the Legion’s national convention in St. Louis tabled a reform resolution targeting 40 & 8’s racial bar. At the 1954 convention, the Internal Affairs Committee “unanimously” passed a resolution to end the membership restriction, but it mandated that it be done by allowing “individual units” of [40 & 8] to pass on membership” In short, a process that left the pace of change firmly in the hands of 40 & 8 affiliates. While no such reform measure made it to the convention floor in the previous ten years, it nevertheless constituted “a compromise” that defeated a much stronger resolution requiring the complete elimination of discrimination and “the immediate

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<sup>315</sup> For the Johnny Baker Post, *Chicago Defender*, May 19, 1951. For Eisenhower’s anti-discrimination comment, *Proceedings, 34<sup>th</sup> National Convention, American Legion, New York, New York*, August, 1-4, 1952, published as *House Document, No. 76*, 83rd Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 38. For discussion of Eisenhower’s September 24, 1955 heart attack, see Peter G. Boyle, *Eisenhower* (Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited/Pearson Longman, 2005), 66. For Meany’s statement, see *New York Times* October 11, 1955, 67. Connell’s comment is in *New York Times*, April 28, 1954, 29.

admission of Negro members” in the 40 & 8. Following “an hour-long bitter debate,” the compromise resolution lost on the floor by “a shouted voice vote.” During 40 & 8’s convention in 1955, its Massachusetts delegation proposed a motion to take “white” out of the membership clause, but failed by a 20-1 vote; while in the Legion’s 1955 national convention, a Colorado Department resolution before the Constitutional Committee, to insert protections against discrimination of members based on race was rejected, thereby preventing it from reaching the floor.<sup>316</sup>

Throughout the 1950s, the black press remained critical of the 40 & 8’s racial policies. For example, in September 1952, the *Chicago Defender* in an editorial criticizing 40 & 8 and the Legion’s national convention on racial matters, highlighted how each organization stood in contradiction to developments in the military, whose former members they represented. “The 40 et 8 ... is still a lily-white organization which turns its back on Negro Legionnaires wishing to affiliate and most of the [Legion’s] posts are organized along racial lines, even though the armed forces have or are in the process of abolishing racial segregation.” In September 1954, the AVC also protested the Legion’s failure to resolve the 40 & 8 issue. As the group’s executive director Andrew Rice wrote national commander Arthur Connell, then presiding over the Legion’s national convention in Washington, D.C., “It is a shocking travesty on the freedom which the American Legion is pledged to defend that it should refuse to require that ... the 40 & 8, eliminate its ban against admitting Negro and Oriental Americans. Convening in the capitol of the entire free world, the

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<sup>316</sup> On the 1953 convention’s action, *New York Times*, July 1954, 1. On the 1954 convention’s actions, *Chicago Defender*, September, 11, 1954, 1. For the votes at the 1955 40 & 8 and Legion conventions, *Chicago Defender*, October 22, 1955, 1; and, *Proceedings, 37<sup>th</sup> National Convention, American Legion, Miami, Florida*, October 10-13, 1955, published as *House Document, No. 282, 84th Congress, 2nd Session*, 33.

Legion, by its action, will make good propaganda for the enemies of freedom everywhere.” In October 1955, following the Legion’s national convention, Kenneth Birkhead wired the Urban League’s, executive director Lester Granger, NAACP’s executive secretary Roy Wilkins, and Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porter’s union president, A. Philip Randolph, calling upon them to join the AVC and others “in lodging the most vigorous protest with the Legion, and in seeking a drastic change in the un-American and anti-democratic practices of that veterans group”<sup>317</sup>

The situation became more difficult for the national Legion and 40 & 8 in September 1958, when 40 & 8 revoked the charter of its San Jose chapter for admitting Gerald Lee, a Chinese American who served as an Army second lieutenant during WWII. Not only did join the local 40 & 8, he also served as commander of the Legion’s 13<sup>th</sup> District and Post 89. In response to the charter revocation, the Santa Clara County 40 & 8’s judge advocate, Louis Leve, brought the matter to Superior Court Judge Raymond J. Callahan, who subsequently ordered the parent organization to justify why its charter revocation should stand, and to cease its efforts to charter a new “all-white” unit. As Leve told the *Afro-American*, “Somebody here called somebody in national headquarters in Indianapolis and the next thing we knew they sent a man here to demand that Lee be expelled or we forfeit our charter. Jerry offered to quit, but we wouldn’t let him. So now they’ve picked up our charter and they’re trying to organize an ‘all white’ 40 & 8 Society here.” On October 1, Judge

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<sup>317</sup> *Chicago Defender* September 6, 1952, 10. Rice’s letter to Connell is reproduced in “AVC Blasts Legion for Race Discrimination,” September 1, 1954, MS 2144, American Veterans Committee Records, Series 3, Official Statements, 1946-2000, Press Releases, box 79, folder 5: 1950-1959, Special Collections Research Center, Gelman Library, George Washington University, Washington, DC, (hereinafter: MS 2144, AVC Records, Ser. 3, Press Releases, GL). For Birkhead’s wire to Granger, Wilkins and Randolph, see “Protests Discriminatory Practices of Legion Organization,” October 13, 1955, MS 2144, Ser. 3, Ibid., folder 6: 1955-1959.

Callahan issued a second restraining order to halt the attempted re-chartering move until trial, and informed the two local 40 & 8 officials behind it, “I suggest to you people that you read the Constitution of the United States... You’ll find it quite refreshing.” In mid-October, Judge Callahan “summoned national officers...of 40 & 8,” to appear before him to answer for their charter revocation order, and to provide a copy of it to the California secretary of state’s office for review, which the group previously refused to make available to Louis Leve. Finally, in July 1959, California Attorney General Stanley Mosk announced the creation of a “constitutional rights section”. As the *New York Times* reported, its purpose is to investigate “infringements of civil rights” and “its first action...will be to join in a law suit against the American Legion’s “40 & 8 affiliates for alleged racial discrimination.” Franklin H. Williams, West Coast NAACP Counsel was appointed to direct the section. Using liberal Cold War Americanism language, AVC’s executive director Irving Lechliter, in September 1958, denounced the charter revocation action, calling for 40 & 8 to “get in step with a vast majority of the truly democratic organizations in America.” As Lechliter declared, “This is not the action of a responsible veterans group The prestige of the United States in the eyes of the world has already been substantially damaged by the intransigency of some people and groups of this country who are trying to perpetuate a system of second class citizenship based on color or race. The 40 et 8 Society apparently feels compelled to contribute its bit to the further deterioration of this country’s prestige.”<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> For the Chapter’s and the court’s initial actions, *New York Times*, September 24, 1958, 3. On Lee’s status in the Legion, *The Afro-American* October 4, 1958, 19; and, *New York Times*, September 28, 1958, E1. For Leve’s quotes regarding the expulsion threat, *The Afro-American* October 4, 1958, 19. On Judge Callahan’s second restraining order, *New York Times*, October 2, 1958, 32. For Callahan’s

About a month after the California attorney general's announcement, delegates at the Legion's August 1959 national convention in Minneapolis, after debating various resolutions, voted 1, 650 to 1, 338 to permit 40 & 8 to continue its racial ban. While, the departments of California, Alaska, and Minnesota led the forces for repeal of the restriction, Hawaii's resolution called for negotiations on the matter between the Legion and the 40 & 8. The convention's vote defeated Alaska's delegation's call for repeal, which maintained the ban violated the Legion's constitution. But, then, by voice vote, the convention approved the Hawaii department's resolution. With their lawsuit still in Santa Clara Superior Court, delegates from Santa Clara distributed to Legionnaires a pamphlet stating, "it is our shame that while other organizations are eliminating discrimination...the 40 & 8, tries to retain it. All good Legionnaires know that a bullet has no racial or religious discrimination." At one point in the debate, using Cold War rhetoric, Hawaii Department Chaplain Edwin Goodwin told convention delegates that, "the Legion was being 'infiltrated by bigotry.'"<sup>319</sup>

Following the convention, outside forces for liberal Americanism again entered the debate. The *New York Times* held up the 1,338 delegates who fought for racial reform as having taken, "the truly American way." The paper also quoted a

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summoning of national 40 & 8 officers and involvement of the secretary of state's office, *New York Times*, October 16, 1958, 32. For the state attorney general's action, *New York Times*, July 28, 1959. "American Veterans Committee Hits 40 et 8 Discrimination," September 25, 1958, MS 2144, ser., 3, Press Releases, box 79, folder 6: 1955-1959.

<sup>319</sup> These details of the convention debates are in: *Chicago Defender*, August 28, 1959, 1; *New York Times*, August 27, 1959, 1; *Washington Post & Times Herald*, August 27, 1959, A10. The quote from the Santa Clara group's pamphlet is in, *Chicago Defender*, August 28, 1959, 1. For Chaplain Goodwin's remark, *New York Times*, August 27, 1959, 1; also the *Chicago Defender* September 12, 1959, 1, and see *Time*, September 7, 1959, 12, which quoted Goodwin as stating, "Those who would introduce bigotry in our organization...are bastards of Satan." This reference may have also been, in his mind, a an allusion to subversion by those akin to communists or their agents.

passage from the recent inauguration speech of Hawaii's first governor, William Quinn: "For the first time, our America has enfolded its people of Polynesian and Asian ancestry in a its warm embrace. A banner of man's equality in a free world has been lifted high for the free world to see and enslaved worlds to see." To this, the *Times* added, "We hope our friends all over the world, East and West, will understand that it was the Legion minority of 1, 338 and Governor Quinn who truly spoke for this nation's hope and faith." The *Chicago Defender* took a more critical position, portraying the Legion as a group existing on the far right fringes of the democratic American mainstream. "There is no longer any need to brood over the fact that the American Legion is an un-American aggregation made up, for the most part, of men of little mind and narrow vision; men whose psychological urge for recognition and power makes them extremely dangerous. In sum, the Legion is the biggest organized nucleus of fascist potential in American today." Further, it observed, "If the Legion wishes to be consistent with its own conscience and outlook, it should drop 'American' from its name." The NAACP held to Cold War rhetoric in its protest. In a message it sent to the Legion's national commander, Preston Moore, the group's executive secretary, Roy Wilkins, pointedly charged that keeping the racial bar provided "ammunition to America's Communist enemies."<sup>320</sup>

Immediately after the 40 & 8 vote, under its national chairman Mickey Levine, the AVC went all-out against the Legion. On August 27, the group wired Congressman Olin Teague, chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee to investigate the Legion's tax-exempt status, arguing that it "has forfeited its

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<sup>320</sup> *New York Times*, September 1, 1959, 28; *Chicago Defender*, September 1, 1959, 1; for Wilkins's quote, *Chicago Defender*, September 5, 1959, 1.

government privileges by its policy of racial discrimination.” The AVC also sent letters of protests, attached with its telegram to Teague, to Vice-President Nixon and a number of liberal senators, including Paul Douglas, Jacob Javits and Hubert Humphrey. Announcements of the investigation call also immediately went out to the Associated Press and United Press International. At its September 1959 National Board meeting “devoted to civil rights matters,” the group considered both the 40 & 8 situation and “the futile efforts of A. Philip Randolph and others to end discrimination in the trade union movement.” In these deliberations, “board members concluded that a concerted drive should be launched at once to eliminate racial discrimination and segregation in veterans’ organizations and labor unions.” The board also unanimously endorsed a plan calling for the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights to create an Ad Hoc Committee to End Segregation in Veterans Organizations and Labor Unions.”<sup>321</sup>

In late September, Levine informed Roy Wilkins, chairman of the NAACP’s Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, of the board’s Ad Hoc Committee plan. As Levine noted, “The AVC proposal does not mean a diminution of joint efforts in other civil rights activities, but rather a branching out into a new field (as far as collective action is concerned) in breaking down segregation and discrimination in non-governmental but none the less public organizations.” For the moment, Wilkins urged an “informal approach,” given what he knew about recent difficulties concerning internal organizational politics in the unions, and in the civil rights groups

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<sup>321</sup> “Congressional Investigation of American Legion Demanded,” MS 2144, ser. 3, Press Releases, box 79, folder 6, 1955-1959; and also the copy of Levine’s telegram to Teague dated August 27, 1959, *Ibid.*, originally attached to this press release. Levine’s call for the investigation also targeted the Legion’s “irresponsible denunciation of the Supreme Court,” and a number of civil liberties groups. *Ibid.* The investigation demand is also covered in *AVC Bulletin*, September, 1959, 1. On the national board’s actions, see *AVC Bulletin*, October, 1959, 1.

contending with discrimination and segregation problems. In December 1959, AVC reported on the steps it had taken organizationally on its own, to assert its version of Americanism against that of the Legion's. Outraged by Nelson Rockefeller's recent comments, which as AVC noted, "praised the Legion's defense of freedom and democratic principles in America", the group announced the formation of its "Legionism Unit," under direction of national board member Martin Keen of New Jersey, "to present to the public the true facts on the role of the American Legion in the United States." As the *Bulletin* reported, the unit's "Task No. 1... will be to inform Governor Rockefeller of the role of the Legion in such undemocratic practices as 'Jim Crow' Posts."<sup>322</sup>

Levine also wrote a scathing editorial in the September 1959 *Bulletin*, emphasizing the Legion's unsavory side. Recalling an early encounter with the Legion, he reported, "The very first time I saw an American Legion uniform was thirty years ago in Wayne County, Pennsylvania. These townspeople I recognized. They were drunk and boisterous—returning from a Ku Klux Klan demonstration in Honesdale. A year or so later, I saw the local Legion post decked in full regalia, carrying clubs and rubber hoses, drive off to act as volunteer strike-breakers in a labor dispute. Two years ago in Mississippi, I learned about Legion beer halls used as meeting places for the degenerate White Citizens Council and Legion leaders inciting defiance and lawlessness. They haven't changed very much! Although senility may

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<sup>322</sup> Levine to Wilkins, September 29, 1959, *Papers of the NAACP, Part 24, Series B: Leagues and Organizations*, AVC, microfilm Reel 29, frames 0193-0194. As Wilkins told Levine, "I am sure you can appreciate that a 'situation' has developed in recent months with respect to discrimination and segregation in labor unions and the positions of certain personalities in organizations on ways and means of attacking same. It is possible that this 'situation' may dictate an informal approach (for the present) so far as the Leadership Conference is concerned." Wilkins to Levine, November 12, 1959, NAACP Papers, *Ibid.*, Reel 29, frame: 0191. On the establishment of the Legionism Unit, see AVC *Bulletin*, December, 1959, 4.

have dulled their sting, they are still venomous.” Levine’s editorial also called upon labor leaders George Meany and Walter Reuther, and NAACP leaders Roy Wilkins and Thurgood Marshall, “ to repudiate publicly at long last this truly subversive group and to look into their souls to see if they really think, along with some of our Senatorial friends, that the Legion is one of the ‘three most distinguished and highly respected nation-wide organizations.’” The references to organized group violence and beer halls, perhaps meant to remind readers of Hitler’s Munich, added to the *Chicago Defender’s* depiction of the Legion as fascistic.<sup>323</sup>

A number of ordinary and prominent African American Legionnaires protested the convention’s vote by resigning from the Legion. Mizell M. Merrill, a rank-and-file member, informed the *Chicago Defender* in early September 1959 that he was “fed up to the neck” with the Legion’s racial policy. Invoking Cold War language, Mizell observed, while the Legion is “supposedly dedicated to the principles of justice, freedom and democracy... This infamous decision must have our enemies abroad laughing up their sleeves for when the Un-American Legion, comprised of those of us who have laid their lives on the line for the aforementioned principles will not recognize the dignity of the individual nor the integrity of his soul, these so-called principles of democracy become a hollow mockery, devoid of all truth.” In declaring his resignation, Mizell told the *Defender’s* readers, “I stand ready to join with any person or group who wishes to organize a truly democratic veterans organization.” Harlem’s state senator, James B. Watson, likewise withdrew from the

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<sup>323</sup> See Levine’s editorial, “The Un-American Legion,” *AVC Bulletin*, September ,1959, 2.

Legion, and termed the 40 & 8 decision a “shockingly tragic demonstration of racial intolerance.”<sup>324</sup>

Congressmen Charles Diggs Jr. only “a few hours” after the vote, wired the Legion’s national commander, Preston Moore, to protest the convention’s action and submit his resignation. As Diggs, an Army lieutenant in WWII, declared, “I cannot...remain a member of the Un-American Legion as long as discrimination is the official policy of the organization.” Diggs also emphasized to Moore that the vote represented an affront to his war service and that of his fellow veterans. “That you in effect, would condone the practices of your 40 and 8 subsidiary in excluding such whole groups of honorably discharged veterans, who have served with sacrifice in defense of our way of life, is indefensible.” Diggs also took the opportunity to underscore how the convention’s decision contradicted Moore’s, and the Legion’s, supposedly hard-line commitments to winning the Cold War. “Your action also throws the shadow of a question across your resolution against the Khrushchev visit. Is the Legion so afraid that Khrushchev will see first-hand, despite our progress in the field of race relations, ample evidence that there is still a wide gap between the theory and practice of democracy, with your negative action on the anti-discrimination proposal as a shining example?” Additionally, Diggs expressed his anguish over northern support delegates for 40 & 8’s discriminatory policy. “The vote of your Southern delegates against the integration proposal was not surprising, but to see a majority of Northern delegates, including those from my own state of Michigan, associate themselves with this anti-democratic viewpoint gives validity to the oft-

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<sup>324</sup> For Mizell’s letter, *Chicago Defender*, (Daily Edition), September 3, 1959, 1. For State Senator Watson’s resignation, *New York Times*, August 31, 1959, 18.

repeated Southern charge that all racial discrimination is not below the Mason-Dixon Line.” In fact, the *Afro-American*, in September 1959, reported that South Carolina Senator Olin D. Johnston, himself a Legionnaire, presented the details of the Legion’s northern delegates’ votes on the Senate floor, in order to help bolster his arguments against desegregation in the nation’s schools. In late October, the *Chicago Defender* gave further expression to African American veterans’ outrage over events, by publishing an editorial from *The Carolina Times* urging all blacks to quit the Legion. “Every Negro member of the American Legion with an ounce of respectability left in his soul and body should follow the lead of ... Congressman Diggs and State Senator James L. Watson and quit the organization.”<sup>325</sup>

Other black Legionnaires choose to continue the fight for reform by making their stand from within. Specifically addressing African-Americans who “can’t understand why Negroes stay in the Legion,” a Legion post “Adjutant,” told the *Chicago Defender*, “One cannot win a battle by quitting or running away. The people of Montgomery, Clifton, and Little Rock did not leave. They stayed and fought until the battle was won. That is exactly what we intend to do.”<sup>326</sup>

While segregationists, like Senator Olin D. Johnston, seized upon the 40 & 8 vote to shore up their arguments for the racial status-quo, integrationists, such as liberal Republican and civil rights advocate Senator Jacob Javits, of New York, both

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<sup>325</sup> Diggs’ comments to Moore are in, *The Afro-American* September 5, 1959, 1-2. Diggs’ resignation is also covered in, *New York Times* August 29, 1959, 38; and, *Washington Post & Times Herald*, August 29, 1959, B16. For Sen. Olin Johnston’s use of the convention vote and his Legionnaire status, see *The Afro-American*, September 12, 1959, 9. For *The Carolina Times* editorial, see *Chicago Defender*, October 17, 1959, 10.

<sup>326</sup> See Smith’s letter in, *Chicago Defender* (Daily Edition), November 11, 1959, 10.

a Legionnaire and AVC member, used the incident to strengthen the case for racial reform.

Like many of his fellow Legionnaires, Javits also decided to fight the Legion's discriminatory policies from within. On August 28, Javits sent a telegram to the Legion's new national commander, Martin B. McKneally, stating his intention to stay in the Legion and "do everything in my power to bring about a reversal of this action." In his initial August 27 statement on the Senate floor, concerning the convention's vote, Javits' also hit the Legionnaires hard by suggesting they had acted like cowards. While he and his Senate colleagues were "bringing into play every legitimate means at their command to bring about floor action on a civil rights bill in Congress," he found it "positively deplorable" that "the Legion should at its annual convention vote this kind of retreat before the forces of intolerance." Further he noted, "to permit" 40 & 8 to continue the race ban, "the American Legion staged a retreat, an action which would have been inconceivable to these same men were they on a battlefield." Javits also strongly implied that the Legion's action hurt America's current world struggle, by undermining the nation's advancements in liberal racial and economic reform. "In the 'cold war' as it is being waged globally today, the common enemy is many things. It most certainly is communism, as the Legion has emphasized so often. It is also abysmally low living standards and the very type of inequality of opportunity that directly stems from intolerance and discrimination. As we fight this common enemy overseas, through our foreign information, military and economic aid and trade programs, so we must fight it at home—never being afraid to meet it head on at first hand when we find it within an organization to which we

belong.” Javits ended his message to his fellow WWII veteran with a liberal Americanism call to arms, noting, “Our patriotic duty and devotion to free institutions and ideals are not fully discharged by honorable conduct on the battlefield. We must be equally fervent in continuing to fight in peace against what we opposed in war—the forces of intolerance everywhere. The fight must be waged in Congress, in convention halls and in our own communities.”<sup>327</sup>

Some 40 & 8ers, however, also choose to resign. For example, Wilbur Lindholm, Minnesota’s Commissioner of Veterans Affairs, resigned from 40 & 8, noting, he could, “no longer tolerate membership in any organization allowing such discrimination”. Lindholm did not suddenly arrive at this decision. “In the last four years,” he explained, “I’ve tried to get a grass roots movement started to remove the word ‘white’ from the constitution.” In spite of these efforts, he noted, “it looks like bigotry will prevail.” Given his experiences, Lindholm concluded, “I don’t foresee any change from within the 40 & 8 unless the Legion kicks them out.”<sup>328</sup>

In keeping with the convention’s mandate, the Legion’s newly elected national commander, Martin B. McKneally, initially attempted to settle the race ban issue through talks with the national 40 & 8. On August 31, four days after the convention ended, McKneally “assured Senator Kenneth B. Keating...that he would do everything possible,” as the *New York Times* reported, “to eliminate [the]

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<sup>327</sup> For the full text of Javits’s telegram to McKneally, see “Release [for] Sunday Papers, August 30, 1959,” Manuscript 285, Jacob Javits Papers, Series 1, Subseries 1, Press Releases, box 19, file: 40 & 8 Discrimination, Frank J. Melville Jr. Memorial Library, Special Collections, State University of New York, Stony Brook, NY, (hereinafter: MS 285, Ser 1., Subseries 1, Javits Papers, MML.) “Statement of Jacob K. Javits, (R-NY), Delivered On the Senate Floor, Thursday, August 27, 1959,” Ibid. For general coverage of Javits’s response to the 40 & 8 convention vote, see *New York Times*, August 28, 1959, 4; and, Ibid., August 30, 1959, 61. “Release [for] Sunday Papers, August 30, 1959,” MS 285, Javits Papers, MML. For McKneally’s WWII service, see *American Legion Magazine*, November, 1959, 48.

<sup>328</sup> *Chicago Defender*, November 28, 1959, 2.

restriction barring Negroes and Orientals from the 40 & 8.” Negotiations with 40 & 8, however, proved to be, as McKneally termed them, “fruitless.” McKneally next brought the issue before the October 1959 meeting of the Legion’s National Executive Committee (NEC,) in a “special report” which detailed the group’s intransigence. He also offered a resolution for the NEC’s approval, authorizing him to force compliance. As McKneally informed NEC members, “It is my considered opinion...that they do not intend to take any action to meet the issue, [and] that it is incumbent upon us to take every available step at our command to require the Forty and Eight to eliminate the white provision from its Constitution.” In making this case to the NEC, McKneally presented his “special report.” Much of the report contained the text of his previously released press statement, of August 31, 1959, in which he laid out “his own personal position on this matter.” The ban, he noted, violated the Legion’s membership requirements, which, “are simple: honorable service by United States citizens in times of war—and none other.” His other key point invoked the language of liberal Americanism. “I believe that The American Legion, composed as it is of veterans of three wars which were fought for the preservation of freedom and human dignity, should be in the forefront in promoting brotherhood and should be the leader in allaying prejudice.” Following its deliberations, the NEC provided McKneally with “special powers,” and authorized him to use “any and all measures” he needed to prevail. If the group failed to comply by November 26, the NEC also made it clear that it would be expelled from the national body.<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> On McKneally’s announcement to Keating, *New York Times*, September 1, 1959, 1. For the point that negotiations proved “fruitless,” see *ALM*, December, 1959, 30. For the full text of McKneally’s special report and his statements before the NEC’s, see *Proceedings of the National Executive Committee, The American Legion*, Indianapolis, Indiana, October 7-9, 1959, 91-93, (hereinafter,

The NEC based its decision on several key factors, two of which focused on organizational rules and the potential legal consequences the racial restriction posed. The committee easily sustained McKneally's point that the group, as a subsidiary unit of the Legion, violated the Legion's constitution, which did not preclude membership according to race. It also held that such racial restrictions on membership were not approved in the Legion's charter granted by Congress, and that they also violated the U.S. Constitution's 14<sup>th</sup> amendment prohibitions against race discrimination. Beyond these points, the NEC also considered the advice of Ralph Gregg, the Legion's national judge advocate, concerning the potential for legal harm to the national body if the ban continued. Citing in particular the litigation regarding the San Jose 40 & 8 charter revocation case, Gregg, stated that the ban meant both the Legion and 40 & 8 could face similar legal difficulties especially from "state attorneys general." Gregg also noted that, "Funds to serve disabled war veterans, granted to the Legion by some of the states, are in jeopardy so long as the 40 & 8 illegality exist." Pennsylvania's Walter E. Allesandroni strongly reinforced these various legal points, especially regarding the Congressional charter. As he stated, "We are, as a legal entity...only what the Congress said we are...it is crystal clear and there can be no disagreement about this. I emphasize: there can be no disagreement, and I have heard none, that The American Legion cannot limit its membership by defining certain classes...as to race, creed, or color." Appealing to his fellow NEC members' conservative attitudes towards the law, and stressing the potential for "grave legal consequences" coming

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*Proceedings, NEC, American Legion*). On the NEC's granting of broad powers to McKneally to secure the ban's elimination, see *Proceedings, NEC, American Legion*, 95. The term "special powers," to describe the NEC's authorization is in, *New York Times*, October 9, 1959, 13. The November 26 deadline is in, *ALM*, December, 1959, 28.

from “individuals, attorneys general...and the United States Government,” Allesandroni declared, “I say to you that this is not a personal decision of the national commander not founded on fact and law...[a] vote in favor of this resolution is nothing more than a vote for law and order, and I urge that you support it.”<sup>330</sup>

Another key consideration weighed by the NEC involved the negative publicity the controversy produced. The NEC’s deliberations emphasized that, “since 1954 at least the Legion had received bad press and a bad reputation for the 40 & 8’s blanket discrimination against non-white Legionnaire war veterans.” Also, the 1959 convention vote to maintain the racial restriction, “resulted in...bad nationwide publicity...that smothered reports of the great work of the Legion.” In speaking to this point during deliberations, one NEC member, Thomas W. Miller, Nevada Department commander, noted that even, “Our great Legionnaire from the Department of Colorado, E. Palmer Hoyt, the editor of the *Denver Post*, comes out and gives us a good raking over.” Likewise, speaking in support of repealing the racial ban, H. Armand de Masi, identifying himself as “the only major city executive editor of a newspaper of this committee,” observed, “I tell you we are going to get continual adverse publicity and we are losing good will.”<sup>331</sup>

In response to those advocating against 40 & 8’s racial ban, southern NEC representatives voiced their considerable displeasure over the pressures for civil rights reform occurring in Dixie, and maintained that forcing 40& 8 to change would only

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<sup>330</sup> *Proceedings, NEC, American Legion Indianapolis, Indiana, October 7-9, 1959, 94, ALM, December, 1959, 28, 30; and, New York Times, October 9, 1959, 13. Judge Advocate Gregg’s specific comments are in ALM, December, 1959, 30. For Allesandroni’s statements, see Proceedings, NEC, American Legion, October 7-9, 1959, 104.*

<sup>331</sup> For the general points regarding negative publicity, see *ALM, December 1959, 30. For Miller’s comments, Proceedings, NEC, American Legion Indianapolis, Indiana, October 7-9, 1959, 97. For de Masi’s point, (who represented the Legion’s overseas Italy Department), Proceedings, NEC, Ibid., 97.*

serve to alienate their members against the Legion. George T. Lewis, of Memphis, Tennessee, told his fellow committeemen of the, “growing resentment against such organizations as the NAACP and other organizations which provide the Negro the chance of forcing them into an integrated school or into a white section, on a public bus, or [sic] many of the other things that they are doing. We are now having trouble with golf courses and other things.” Having apprised NEC members of the “problem” of an especially high concentration of blacks, “in Shelby County where I live,” and in other counties in the region, Lewis warned of that ending the racial ban would undercut the Legion’s southern membership base. “The loss of membership,” he argued, “is going to come from the White [sic] Legionnaires who resent the fact that the national organization is attempting to dictate to the Forty and Eight a step which they regard as the colored man getting his foot a little farther in the door and I think it will make it very difficult for our membership there in my department of about 55,000 members. We have between three and four thousand colored members. The majority of our membership comes from white people.” Certain of the impending trouble among his white membership, Lewis declared, “I personally think if we are going to throw the Forty and Eight out, I would rather a lot [sic] rather throw them out for ungentlemanly conduct than to make it a racial issue.” The Mississippi Department’s representative, Ralph Godwin, concurred with Lewis. “I ask that you not question my love for The [sic] American Legion,” Godwin said, “but I most heartily second the remarks of my good lawyer friend from Tennessee. The problem is serious and when it comes to a vote Mississippi must be recorded as voting no.” Indicative of his disdain for the NEC’s repeal of the ban, at the meeting’s closing,

Godwin blurted out his objection, “May the record indicate that Mississippi voted ‘No’.”<sup>332</sup>

NEC members Armand de Masi and North Dakota’s William Stern dismissed these notions of member defections. As de Masi noted, “We are not going to lose members because of this. We are losing members already and we have lost members by people who have dropped out of Forty and Eight because of this thing.” Stern, also commenting that he was “proud” as a Republican that Miller had mentioned Senator Joe McCarthy’s name in his presentation on adverse publicity, likewise voiced the opinion that, “we have lost membership over the years and this never entered into the situation whatsoever. Therefore I don’t believe we are going to lose any membership because of this controversy in any way... We have other reasons for gaining membership besides this discussion.”<sup>333</sup>

Thomas Miller advanced a positive reform-minded position on race. “[The national commander]...has presented his report to you...Now in this committee room...have been ...representatives of all of the races of the Mediterranean, the Greeks, the Italians, the Spanish, the French, and going into the Pacific we have sitting right here as members of this NEC [my abbrev.] two splendid representatives of the Chinese race, our committeeman from Hawaii, Wally Young, and the alternate...Arizona, Soleng Tom. Would you deny them membership in this fun-loving, hot footing, fanny-pinching, town wrecking branch of The American Legion? Certainly you would not.” Further he noted, “If the 50<sup>th</sup> state of the Union sees fit to

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<sup>332</sup> For Lewis’s comments, *Proceedings, NEC*, October 7-9, 1959, 100-101; and see Godwin, *Ibid.*, 102, 104.

<sup>333</sup> For de Masi and Stern, *Proceedings, NEC, American Legion*, October 7-9, 1959, 101. Stern also commented that he was “proud” as a Republican that Miller had mentioned Senator Joe McCarthy’s name in his presentation on adverse publicity. *Ibid.*

send a full-blooded member of the Chinese race to the United States Senate, a Republican, or a full-blooded member of the Japanese race to the Lower House of Congress, Mr. Inouye, ...it certainly is high time that The American Legion took the steps recommended to us by our national commander.”<sup>334</sup>

Confronted by 40 & 8’s continued defiance of the NEC’s decision, in late October 1959 McKneally threatened “court action.” On November 30, he ordered the Legion’s judge advocate to proceed “‘immediately with legal proceedings testing the validity of the racial restriction.’” Subsequently, on December 4, McKneally formally barred 40 & 8 from using the Legion’s emblem and participating in its events. Later, in July 1960 the Legion persuaded Miami Beach’s city manager to deny the 40 & 8’ers a permit to join its scheduled national convention parade there in October. As McKneally stated the case, their presence in the parade “would have been ‘offensive’ to the Legion.” The *Afro-American* reported that the Legion, in fact, “threatened to move its convention from Miami Beach if the 40 and 8 Society is to be given a parade permit.” At the October convention, some delegations, “spearheaded” by the southern departments, moved to restore 40 & 8’s standing in the national body. While some southern delegates “said the issue was not primarily racial,” Mississippi NEC member Ralph Goodwin told reporters that the 40 & 8 might opt for an independent status to avoid compliance, and that, “pins for a separate outfit had already been printed and would carry the slogan ‘white all the way.’” The Legion’s Internal Affairs

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<sup>334</sup> *Proceedings, NEC, American Legion*, 96.

Committee, however, upheld the NEC's actions, and the full convention voted 2, 344 to 693, sustaining that decision.<sup>335</sup>

From the time McKneally initially acted in October 1959 to force 40 & 8 into account for its membership ban, the black press and other liberal outlets praised the Legion's new approach. In late October, the *Afro-American* declared, "because of its backward stand on so many issues in which we are interested, ... we have consistently regarded the Legion with the same lack of affection we hold for the Daughters of the American Revolution. But no more." As the editorial noted, "Happily we find we must revise our appraisal of the Legion and gladly we doff our hats to its executive committee for the forthright stand it has adopted against discrimination." As the paper concluded, "This is indeed a move forward that merits the applause of all freedom-loving Americans, veterans and non-veterans alike." In November 1959, the *Chicago Defender* reprinted a story from the *Cleveland Call-Post* noting, "if the ultimatum moves the Forty and Eight to get out the Legion, everybody concerned should rejoice." The story also recognized the work of two Cleveland Legionnaires, Lawrence Schumake and Jimmy Johnson. "Both men," it noted, "played outstanding parts in bringing this un-American policy of one of the nation's ultra-patriotic groups to public attention, and despite rebuffs, both fought ceaselessly to bring about official censure of its blatant discrimination against Negro war veterans." Later, in mid-

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<sup>335</sup> On McKneally's threatened court action, see *New York Times*, October 26, 1959, 18; and *Ibid.*, December 1, 1959, 23. For the NEC's action barring 40 & 8 from use of the Legion's emblem and its activities, *Ibid.*, December 5, 1959. On the parade permit denial, and McKneally's rationale for it, *Ibid.*, July 20, 1960, 18. For the Legion's threat to relocate the convention, *The Afro-American*, July 23, 1959, 6. On the southerners' actions and the "white all the way pins," *New York Times*, October 19, 1960. For Goodwin's NEC status, see *The Mississippi Veteran*, November, 1960, 1. Indicative of southern Legionnaires' concerns over ending the racial restrictions, Goodwin, in this issue of the paper, provided a lengthy report on the national convention's actions on 40 & 8, and a very long report earlier, see *The Mississippi Veteran*, November 1959, 1-3. For the full convention's vote tally, see *The Afro-American*, October 29, 1960, 1.

December, the *Chicago Defender* observed, “By removing this fun-making, prejudice inspired unit from its membership the Legion has removed dead rats from under the house.” In early December, the *New York Times* stated, “As a newspaper critical of the American Legion’s views on many matters of public policy, ranging from veterans’ legislation to civil liberties we are encouraged to see the Legion take this strong position against discrimination and in favor of decent race relations.”<sup>336</sup>

For his part, Congressman Diggs embraced news of the change by rescinding his resignation from Detroit’s Charles Young Post 77. Senator Javits sent McKneally a congratulatory telegram emphasizing “the personal attention you have given this matter commencing with your election as national commander...last August.” Javits again took the opportunity to highlight the importance of the policy change to the Cold War. “This action by you...is powerful proof to the citizens of the free world and the communist bloc that the fight to secure equal rights for all Americans under the law is being pressed with vigor and purpose by our national leaders. I cannot emphasize to you too strongly how important this fact is in fortifying the prestige of the U. S. peace leadership”<sup>337</sup>

Representing the AVC, Mickey Levine rebutted the favorable *New York Times* editorial, and by implication, the positive views expressed by other liberal critics as well. While agreeing with the “sentiments expressed,” by the *Times*, Levine wrote, “This is the important point to consider. The Legion is still a segregated organization with Jim Crow posts in every state in the Union.” Levine also attributed

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<sup>336</sup> *The Afro-American*, October 24, 1959, 4; *Chicago Defender*, November 21, 1959, 10; *Chicago Defender* December 17, 1959, A12; *New York Times*, December 7, 1959, 30.

<sup>337</sup> For Diggs’s resumption of his Legion membership, *The Afro-American*, December 19, 1959, 6. For Javits’s statement, see press release, December 1, 1959, MS 285, Javits Papers, Ser.1, Subser. 1, Press Releases, box 19, file: 40 & 8 Discrimination, MML.

the Legion's policy shift, not to idealism, but to organizational self-interest. "The only reason it took action against the 40 & 8 was because, while the 40 & 8 remained a Legion affiliate, the Legion itself was open to grave legal consequences, including subjecting itself to tax payers' suits." Citing, verbatim, from the December 1959 *American Legion Magazine*, Levine stated that the NEC's ruling "would not compel any [40 & 8 chapter] to accept redheads, blondes, brunettes, Navy chiefs, Negroes, Chinese, whites, major generals, or any other special class, race, occupation, religion or other subcategory of the human species." Levine also announced the AVC's intention to maintain its "taxpayers' suit against the 40 & 8," and "to fight against all veterans organizations, including the American Legion, that operate as segregated institutions, rather than as honorable veterans organizations."<sup>338</sup>

The points Levine emphasized were apparent in the Legion's internal deliberations. The NEC did consider the legal ramifications of 40 & 8's continued affiliation, and despite Thomas Miller's expressions of racial inclusion, it made no constitutional moves towards prohibiting the practice of racial segregation among its own units. Although Levine's letter to the *New York Times* did not mention the negative publicity stemming from 40 & 8's Legion affiliation, the NEC clearly did view it an important issue. The NEC's authorization for McKneally to act against 40 & 8's whites only membership restriction, as Levine's critique pointed out, did reflect matters of organizational self-interest, distinct from concerns for promoting racial equality, especially as regards the group's desire to avoid further damage to its public image. But the NEC's actions, and the full convention's endorsement of them, also

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<sup>338</sup> See Levine's letter to the editor, "Segregating Veterans," (dated December 10), *New York Times*, December 14, 1959, 30. Levine's quote regarding the perpetuation of exclusionary racial practices by 40 & 8 voitures is taken directly from the report published in *ALM*, December 1959, 30.

reflected larger changes in the culture concerning race. As Gary Gerstle's recent study of race and nationalism has shown, many Americans in the 1950s were embracing more inclusive notions of nationality that welcomed Jews, Italians, and Catholics, as well as African-Americans, into the country's "imagined community" of acceptable citizens.<sup>339</sup> As the 40 & 8 episode reveals, in this period of transition, these changing attitudes probably began to move at least a certain number of Legionnaires to the conclusion that blatantly restrictive membership rules based on race, carried over from the interwar years, were no longer acceptable. Yet, while these new values seemed to have resonated with white Legionnaires to some extent, they did not, as Levine's criticism made painfully clear, bring them to end segregation.

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<sup>339</sup> On the 1950s as a transition to more liberal attitudes towards race, see Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 23-25, esp. Chapter 6, 240-241, 247, 266-267. The term "imagined community" belongs to Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities, Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, New Edition, (New York: Verso, 2006).

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

As the study has shown, after World War Two, the American Legion emerged as an important force of conservative opposition to the New Deal. As did other conservative individuals and organizations, the Legion viewed the liberal centralized welfare state as an unwarranted encroachment upon the American way of life, defined as individual liberty, the system of laissez faire free enterprise and states' rights. In keeping with dominant conservative viewpoints, the Legion regarded New Deal liberalism as an alien and un-American development. In the 1950s, through its Americanism program, it brought its considerable organizational resources to bear in support of the broader efforts of conservatives to stop the advance of the New Deal/Fair Deal state. Through its national magazine, the Legion warned its nearly three million members that liberalism had placed the nation on a dangerous path towards becoming a collectivist dictatorship that is, the very type of society the United States was waging a Cold War to defeat. Its anti-subversives activities, an integral part of its Americanism program, facilitated its efforts to discredit liberalism as alien and radical.

The postwar Legion also opposed the efforts of the liberal state to use its power to extend social benefits and political rights to groups previously denied access to them, especially African Americans. It worked with conservative business organizations to defeat public housing programs. Also, through its alliance with the American Medical Association, the Legion helped to defeat the expansion of health care to millions of Americans. In the South, Legionnaires joined the movement to massively resist the emerging black civil rights movement; and, using conservative

Cold War discourse, it denounced efforts of the federal government to enforce racial integration as akin to the actions of Soviet totalitarians. Since the national Legion refused to alter its long-standing policy permitting racial segregation among its affiliates, and failed to confront the anti-civil rights activities of its southern branches, it facilitated its solidification into a major instrument of racial segregation in the 1950s. Its opposition to U.S. Supreme Court rulings giving federal authorities exclusive jurisdiction in enforcing laws against sedition converged with the interests of segregationist Legionnaires aligned against growing federal encroachments on individual state authority over civil rights matters. In short, through its opposition to the role of the interventionist state in the economy and in civil rights policy, in important ways, the Legion helped establish the conservative political culture of the 1950s.

Yet as this study has also shown, conservative dominance did not remain unchallenged. Despite the hegemonic power of conservative Cold War Americanism, a small, but persistent, portion of the organized veterans' community, the American Veterans Committee, dissented, and attempted to counter the Legion. Using a liberal Americanism, the AVC promoted the New Deal legacy both as regards its promise of expanded economic security and equal access to its social provisions irrespective of race by extending full civil rights to all citizens. The example of the AVC sheds further light on how anti-Communist rhetoric served multiple political agendas in the 1950s. Its Cold War discourse opposed the efforts of conservatives to conflate liberalism with subversion through its representations of New Deal economic regulations, and (the primary focus of this study), images it produced as it

implemented its Americanism program activities on behalf of civil liberties and civil rights. Its attempt to challenge anti-New Deal forces disrupts the notion that an untrammelled conservative consensus defined the political culture of the 1950s. The Cold War opened a very narrow space for the AVC to promote its reform program. The AVC's failure to achieve its goals, however, highlights the limits of Cold War discourse as a language of reform in this period. Yet, its presence in the 1950s, though muted, ensured that the conservative Legion was not, as then AVC national chairman Mickey Levine put it in 1955, "the ONLY VETERANS voice heard."<sup>340</sup>

Yet even as the civil rights movement intensified in the 1960s, the Legion remained a force for segregation and massive resistance to racial change. In December 1960, the all-white Legion post in Jackson (TN) demanded that Legion national commander Martin A. McKneally and HUAC investigate Lane College, a local black institution, after its marching band "during the half-time ceremony" of a football game, "played the Russian national anthem while standing in a hammer and sickle formation." But as Lane College President Chester A. Kirkendall explained to the *Afro-American*, the band had played "the anthems of all of the 'Big Four' nations, Russia, France, England, and the United States...in that order." Kirkendall also connected the white Legionnaires' protest to civil rights. "They are just angry about the sit-downs that started here last month." Indeed, as the *Afro-American* reported, 11 Lane students had recently been arrested "while staging a sit-down at Woolworth's and McCellan's five and dime." While local units of the VFW and the Disabled American Veterans supported the Legion's protest, the all-black Lake Cisco Legion Post 485 "countered" it with "telegrams endorsing the college to both the House

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<sup>340</sup> *AVC Bulletin*, December 1955, 2.

Committee and...to McKneally.” Student protests were in fact increasing in the Jackson area. As the *Afro-American* reported, “Nineteen students who participated in an Election Day parade Saturday were fined \$50 on a charge of parading without a permit. The convictions brought to 58 the number of students who have been tried. A total of 144 were arrested. The fines are being appealed.”<sup>341</sup>

Also, when asked on “Meet the Press” in early October 1963 to state the Legion’s policy on civil rights, then national commander Daniel F. Foley told reporters “the Legion had adopted the House Un-American Activities Committee definition of Americanism calling for ‘class, religious and racial tolerance,’” and “has taken no position on rights legislation.”<sup>342</sup> The Legion’s stance on civil rights continued to generate protests from liberal critics. In September 1966, the AVC asked President Johnson not to address national Legion convention then meeting Washington, DC, because, as the group declared, “the Legion is ‘still overwhelmingly a segregated organization.’” After Johnson spoke at the convention, the Americans for Democratic Action publicly criticized his action, and informed the President that his participation assured “Legion officials...[of] indifference on your part to their racial segregation policies.”<sup>343</sup>

Despite these protests, the Legion continued to permit segregation in local affiliates in the early 1970s. In January 1972, Mrs. Madeline W. Murphy wrote the *Afro-American*, “It is quite predictable that a racist organization such as the American Legion can raise its thunderous 200 percent American voice while flouting all true Americanism with separate Legion posts for black and white. Doing this in spite of

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<sup>341</sup> The *Afro-American*, December 3, 1960, 1.

<sup>342</sup> *Washington Post & Times Herald*, October 2, 1963, B5.

<sup>343</sup> The *Afro-American*, September 10, 1966, 13.

the fact that the black man has fought in every dirty war in the dirtiest jobs and in numbers (particularly in Vietnam) way out of proportion to his ratio to the total population.” Murphy began her letter recalling her mother’s participation in a political rally “some thirty five years ago” for Republican U.S. Senator John Williams, who told his all-black audience, “I know how you all have always been loyal to the white man’s flag.” Incensed by the remark, her mother “interrupted him,” and proclaimed, “How many wars must the Negroes fight before the U.S. flag becomes the black man’s flag?”<sup>344</sup> With the persistence of segregation in the Legion in the early 1970s, its conservative Americanism still offered no definitive answer to that question. But as this study suggests, given its prominence in the conservative backlash against liberalism in the 1950s, its role in helping to create the postwar Right deserves fuller examination.

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<sup>344</sup> Letter to the editor, Mrs. Madeline Murphy, “White Man’s Flag?,” *Afro-American*, January 29, 1972, 5.

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