BIRDS OF A DIFFERENT FEATHER:
AFRICAN AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR THE VIETNAM WAR
IN THE JOHNSON YEARS, 1965-1969

DISSERTATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

In 1996 diplomatic historian Brenda Gayle Plummer wrote that "black American opinion has rarely been univocal and particularly so in the realm of foreign affairs," yet this complexity has rarely appeared in accounts of African Americans and the Vietnam War. Since the early 1970s, U.S. scholars have enshrined an overly monolithic view of African Americans and the Vietnam War by focusing almost entirely on African American antiwar sentiment, obscuring a substantial base of African American support in the 1960s. This dissertation contends that this depiction of an African American community disproportionately united against the war in the Johnson years is overly simplistic and historically inaccurate.

In reality, African Americans, as a whole, were no less supportive of the Vietnam War in the Johnson years than they had been of any other U.S. military conflict. In fact at various times, they were more supportive of the war than their white counterparts due to the pro-civil rights stance of the administration and the opportunities presented by a fully integrated military and a war time economy. Because African American opinion on the Vietnam conflict in the Johnson years was uniquely rooted in domestic concerns linked to the fight for socioeconomic justice and civil and political rights, it is difficult to fit African American opinion during this period into the traditional categories of hawks and doves. Neither hawks nor
Doves, African American war supporters in the Johnson years seemed to be "birds of a different feather."

This dissertation seeks to add much-needed balance to the narrative of blacks and the Vietnam War by exploring the reasons why a significant number of African Americans supported the war during the Johnson years and by assessing the consequences of that support. In doing so, it builds on the work of U.S. diplomatic historians like Plummer, Gerald Gill, and Jonathan Seth Rosenberg and British historians like Manfred Berg, Adam Fairclough, and Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, who have all acknowledged that African American opinion on the Vietnam War during the Johnson years may have been more publicly, consciously, and sharply divided than during any other twentieth century conflict.

By focusing on the NAACP and the Urban League to examine African American support for the war, this seeks to connect the Vietnam and civil rights historiographies by presenting the more complex portrait of an African American community caught between the War on Poverty and the War in Vietnam. It argues that the support of moderate civil rights leaders was the manifestation of a broad consensus in the larger African American community regarding the administration's unprecedented support of civil rights and a shared vision of the Johnson presidency. And it contends that the depiction of civil rights leaders who supported the Vietnam War during this period as out-of-touch, sycophants to President Johnson obscures their connection to and their place within the broader African American community.
The first three chapters of this six-chapter dissertation provide a basis for understanding the three that follow. The introduction presents the themes and assertions to be supported by the dissertation and place this study within the diplomatic history and civil rights historiographies. Chapter one surveys presidential relations with civil rights leaders and the African American response to U.S. military engagements in the period between World War II and the U.S. military escalation in Vietnam. Chapter two explores the organizational histories of the NAACP and the National Urban League, the personal and professional histories of their leadership, and their relationship with Lyndon Johnson prior to his presidency. It is the legacy of these interactions between the civil rights community, the federal government, and the African American community that formed the basis of African American support for Johnson administration policies in Vietnam once the military build-up began in 1965.

The final three chapters focus exclusively on the Johnson presidency. Chapter three explores the relationship between the mainstream civil rights community, the African American community, and the Johnson White House from November 1963 to early 1967 when Martin Luther King, Jr.’s decision to join the antiwar movement altered their relationship to each other and to the antiwar movement. Paradoxically, these years represented an era of unprecedented legislative progress and collaboration between the White House and civil rights leaders and irreparable fragmentation within the civil rights movement. They marked the end of the legislative phase of the civil rights movement and the beginning of the military build-up in Southeast Asia in 1965, the de-escalation of the War on Poverty and the rise of black nationalism in 1966, and
set the framework for the African American response to the war in the remaining years of the Johnson presidency. Chapter four explores the first manifestations of significant black antiwar protest and examines the consequences of a pro-administration stance for the NAACP and the Urban League with the civil rights community, the broader African American community, and the White House in the wake of the events leading up to the 1968 presidential race.

Finally, the concluding chapter draws on the information presented in the preceding chapters to answer the following questions: Were the positions taken by the NAACP and Urban League on the war indicative of a leadership so out-of-touch with mainstream African American opinion on the war that their support was merely an expression of their own self-interest or a result of White House manipulation? Or were they reflections of a significant strain of African American sentiment regarding the war and the Johnson presidency? To what degree did the White House orchestrate African American support for the war? Were specific benefits or rewards anticipated by or promised to civil rights leaders who supported U.S. policy in Southeast Asia? If so, were these benefits shared with the broader African American community? Finally, were African Americans right to stick with Johnson on Vietnam?

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INTRODUCTION


"As long as social welfare issues continue to be both political objects and Negro group goals and as long as the Democratic Party continues to be favorably linked with such policies by Negroes, Democratic party leaders can pursue, with relative impunity, any foreign policies they desire and still be certain of overwhelming Negro electoral support."

Allan Kornberg, 1968

"I've always felt that if it hadn't been for the Viet Nam War-- which is one of the ironical bits of fate-- that Mr. Johnson would have made America the Great Society. He had all of the skills and the conviction, the dedication, the motivation that was needed in the domestic area, that could have mobilized the people, could have gotten the resources, could have made them see this as an investment."

Whitney M. Young, Jr.

"Other than an occasional reference to a few celebrated instances of black protest to the war, blacks are largely invisible in the political and diplomatic histories of the Vietnam War. Even some of the best general accounts of the war . . . fail to give much attention to blacks."

Ernest M.B. Obadele Starks and Amilcar Shabazz, 1993

The Cold War and the modern civil rights movement defined U.S. history in the post-World War II era and changed the socio-political landscape of the last half of the twentieth century. Inextricably interwoven during the presidency of Lyndon Johnson by the passage of the landmark civil rights acts and the escalation of the Vietnam War in the mid-1960s, their convergence has received little attention in the growing
literature on both subjects. Instead both U.S. civil rights historians and diplomatic historians have chosen to focus their research on pushing back the origins of both conflicts into earlier administrations and, in the case of the civil rights historians, on uncovering the genesis of the national movement in local community struggles. This decision has left the intersection of the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War to a handful of non-historians, U.S. doctoral candidates, and British historians of the civil rights and antiwar movement whose geographical and chronological distance apparently enabled them to look at U.S. history in the 1960s with a dispassion many U.S. historians lacked.

Since the first appearance of a Vietnam antiwar historiography in the early 1970s, U.S. scholars have enshrined an overly monolithic view of African American opinion regarding the Vietnam War. In doing so, they obscured substantial African American support by focusing almost entirely on the antiwar rhetoric of a handful of “representative spokespersons” whose influence is more presumed than proven. And by “blurring” the chronology they have presented a much broader base of opposition than actually existed in the 1960s. Undergirded by a facile reading of polling data and secondary sources and an ahistorical focus on Martin Luther King, Jr., the firmly established view that African Americans disproportionally opposed the war seemed to obviate the need for further scholarly research despite the fact that polls taken shortly after Martin Luther King, Jr. joined the antiwar movement in the spring of 1967
indicated that 48 per cent of African Americans disagreed with King’s stand and another 27 per cent were “reserving judgment.”

While few African Americans doubted King’s sincerity, they suspected that much of the other anti-war criticism leveled against President Johnson was a convenient discursive cover for conservatives and pseudo-liberals who lacked the president’s commitment to civil rights. In 1991 Joseph Califano, Johnson’s top domestic policy adviser, wrote that “the President received much more vitriolic mail for his pursuit of racial justice than for his Vietnam policies... His fair-housing bill to Congress in 1966...,” according to Califano, “prompted some of the most vicious mail LBJ received on any subject (and the only death threats I ever received as a White House assistant).” Califano’s revelation was hardly a surprise to African Americans or to civil rights veterans like Clarence Mitchell and Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall. Mitchell, the chief lobbyist for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) always maintained that Johnson’s detractors were “merely using the war as a palpable excuse to condemn him for his strong advocacy of civil rights and support for African Americans.” Marshall contended that Johnson “wasn’t thrown out because of Vietnam,” but rather because “he was too far out for Negroes and civil rights.”

Lyndon Johnson was the key to African American support for the war in Vietnam. Never before had a president been so accessible and attentive to civil rights and to civil rights leaders. He not only supported their agenda; he fought for it. And
he didn’t just take their calls; he initiated them. In doing so, at some political cost to himself, Johnson *earned* the loyalty and support of black leaders and black Americans in general. African Americans as celebrated as United States Senator Edward Brooke and baseball Hall of Famer Jackie Robinson and as faceless as ghetto residents in Baltimore, Chicago, Cleveland, New York, and Philadelphia supported the war. The administration even found allies as unlikely as Nobel Peace Prize winner and U.N. Undersecretary Ralph Bunche and March on Washington organizer Bayard Rustin, a World War II conscientious objector. An indication of the degree to which African American support for U.S. foreign policy in Southeast Asia was linked to Lyndon Johnson personally is the degree to which it quickly faded once he left office. Fifty-four per cent of African Americans agreed with Johnson’s handling of the war in 1966, a significantly higher percentage than the 41 per cent approval rating given by whites. Yet just one year after Johnson left office, the percentage of African Americans supporting withdrawal from Vietnam skyrocketed from the 18 per cent it had been in 1966 to 50 per cent, while only a third of the whites supported it despite the essential continuity in U.S. policy in Vietnam. The difference for African Americans was the clear discontinuity in domestic policy toward civil rights.

The dawn of the twenty-first century bodes well for the emergence of this more complex narrative of a nation and an African American community caught between the War on Poverty and the War in Vietnam in the 1960s. As more of the papers of the
Johnson administration become declassified, as diplomatic historians become more comfortable with analytical tools borrowed from other historical disciplines, and as a new generation of researchers enters the profession, the ever-growing Vietnam historiography will almost certainly respond to the observation of Shabazz and Starks regarding the absence of African Americans from the literature.

Already diplomatic historian Brenda Gayle Plummer has provided the basis for doing so. In *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960*, Plummer asserts that “black American opinion has rarely been univocal and particularly so in the realm of foreign affairs…. Historical inquiry” Plummer contends, not only reveals “the heterogeneity of black views on international questions. It dramatically highlights the need to place black ideological expression in relation to particular conditions and specific eras.”¹² Despite the fact that *Rising Wind* ends before the military escalation in Vietnam begins, it also provides four important analytical precedents for any diplomatic history of African Americans and the Vietnam War. After all, many World War II and early Cold War paradigms shaped the thinking of both government officials and civil rights leaders during the Johnson years. First, Plummer’s assertion that black interests rarely coincided with U.S. foreign policy perspectives built, as diplomatic historian Michael Hunt demonstrated, on a racial hierarchy puts Vietnam anti-war sentiment in its proper perspective in relation to other twentieth century military conflicts. Second, her contention that on rare occasions U.S. foreign policy objectives *have* coincided with the goals of black Americans creates
room for the possibility of something other than knee-jerk opposition and blind acquiescence for African Americans opinion on the Vietnam War. Third, although *Rising Wind* can be characterized as a history of dissent, Plummer, nonetheless, notes that black opinion on U.S. foreign policy was never monolithic, contradicting the prevailing paradigm regarding African Americans and the Vietnam War. Fourth, by exploring various ideological splits, personal antagonisms, and organizational disputes in the African American community over previous military conflicts, Plummer inserts much-needed complexity regarding African American thought on just about any topic. But understanding is particularly salient when discussing the Vietnam War in the Johnson years when African American opinion may have been more publicly, consciously, and sharply divided than during any other twentieth century international conflict. Although Plummer’s actual discussion of Vietnam in the epilogue of *Rising Wind* was cursory at best, she made important intellectual contributions to any diplomatic history of African Americans and the Vietnam War.

In applying Plummer’s paradigms to the Vietnam War, this dissertation makes several assertions. First, it argues that the depiction of an African American community disproportionately united against the war in the Johnson years is overly simplistic and historically inaccurate. African Americans, as a whole, were no less supportive of the Vietnam War in the Johnson years than they had been of any other U.S. military conflict. In fact at various times, they were more supportive of the war than their white counterparts due to the pro-civil rights stance of the administration and
the economic opportunities presented by a fully integrated military. Second, it contends that the depiction of civil rights leaders who supported the Vietnam War during this period as out-of-touch, sycophants to President Johnson obscures their connection to and place within the broader African American community. Their support for the administration was far more than just the latest example of civil rights leaders stifling their international interests for the sake of a few civil rights crumbs. In the case of Vietnam, their international interests were not nearly as apparent or widespread; nor were the civil rights advances as contingent and small. Instead, the support of moderate civil rights leaders was the manifestation of a broad consensus in the larger African American community regarding the administration’s unprecedented support of civil rights and a shared vision of the Johnson presidency. And finally, because African American opinion on the Vietnam conflict in the Johnson years was rooted primarily in domestic concerns linked to the fight for socioeconomic justice and civil and political rights, it is difficult to fit the African American leadership during this period into the traditional categories of hawks and doves. Neither hawks nor doves, African American war supporters in the Johnson years seemed to be “birds of a different feather.”

But African American war supporters weren’t the only ones suffering from an identity crisis in the mid-1960s. Historian Jonathan Rosenberg noted that “a youthful reformer … in the early 1960s would have witnessed a movement without a clear center of gravity. In the 1930s or 1940s, a young person committed to building society free
of racial persecution, would...have likely become a member of the NAACP. During the 1960s, this was no longer the case.³⁶⁶ By 1965 four new groups had joined the NAACP and Roy Wilkins at the forefront of the civil rights movement. Together these groups made up the “Big Five” civil rights organization and along with labor leader, A. Philip Randolph, of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the heads of these organizations formed what was commonly referred to as the “Big Six” of civil rights leadership. So by the start of the military escalation in Vietnam in 1965 the African American community was more publicly “multi-vocal” than it had ever been. In order to better understand the multiple “voices” of the “Big Five” civil rights organizations discussed in this study brief descriptions follow. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) was founded in 1942 and was the first civil rights organization to employ the direct action techniques of nonviolent political pacifism in response to U.S. racism. In the 1940s CORE pioneered the sit-ins and the Freedom Rides that would, finally, gain worldwide attention in the early 1960s. Interracial in composition, CORE maintained a small, active membership organized into approximately local chapters by the late 1960s. Led by James Farmer, a World War II conscientious objector and former NAACP program director for the first half of the 1960s and later by Floyd McKissick, the group was dubbed by Farmer the “nonviolent Marines” of the civil rights movement.

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) was formed in 1957 as an outgrowth of the Montgomery bus boycott and was the first civil rights organization
founded in the South. Described by one author as the "organizational embodiment" of its leader Martin Luther King, Jr., SCLC, as an entity was, by all accounts, more amorphous than functional, relying heavily on King for its continued existence. Taking as its mission "to redeem the soul of America," the approximately 100 affiliated members, mostly church-affiliated civic organizations and church groups, primarily raised money to fund local voter registration and desegregation projects.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was formed in 1960. Its initial purpose was to facilitate communication among black college students engaged in sit-ins throughout the South. Not really a membership organization, SNCC's 200 field secretaries sought to organize large-scale voter-education and registration projects in the rural south. Loosely organized with no clear lines of authority, SNCC was led in the early 1960s by the triumvirate of Bob Moses, James Foreman, and John Lewis until Lewis' ouster by Stokely Carmichael in 1966. Under Carmichael SNCC took a more militant and radical turn leading to the expulsion of white students who, in turn, joined the antiwar movement.

The NAACP and the National Urban League were the two oldest, largest, best financed, and most interracial of the "Big Five" organizations. Despite its reputation as an organization "run by a conservative Black Bourgeoisie wedded to legalism," civil rights historian August Meier found that the NAACP of the 1960s, "because of its strong ties to churches and fraternal organizations... had a better cross section of the
Negro community than any other national racial advancement organization ... [making it] closer than any of the others to representing the majority voice of that community.” Sociologist Adrian F. Aveni concurred, noting that when measured by public opinion polls and membership size, the NAACP of the 1960s, compared with other voluntary or social movement organizations, received substantial support from the general public. So while the NAACP may have appeared elitist as the only civil rights organization with both a Washington lobbyist and a separate legal defense fund, it was also the only civil rights organization funded primarily by the black community, receiving 90% of its funding from black sources. A member of the national staff since 1931 and executive director from 1955 to 1977, Roy Wilkins had long awaited the day when a U.S. president would take up the cause of the NAACP’s over 400,000 members. Wilkins knew well the power of the chief executive to propel or retard an agenda that focused almost exclusively on remedying the maladies of racism and discrimination through the judicial and legislative process.

Although most scholars of the 1960s civil rights movement readily include the Urban League as a member of the “Big Five,” the Urban League, according to sociologist Herbert Haines, “is one of the most difficult [organizations] to classify.” Because of its longstanding division of labor agreement with the NAACP and its focus on job placement and training rather than the more traditional methods of racial advancement like voting rights or demonstrations, the National Urban League was not seen as, nor did it consider itself, a civil rights organization until 1961. Only after
Whitney Young, who had previous relationships with both the NAACP and the SCLC, became executive director did the Urban League take its place among the “Big Five.” As a professional coalition of white businessmen and black social workers, dependent on grants from and partnerships with philanthropic foundations, private corporations, and the federal government, the Urban League sought to bring African Americans into the capitalist system, not undo it. But as “the one national organization with a traditional base in the cities,” its conservative methods often masked a progressive economic agenda that re-appeared in the programs of more “radical” organizations. The Urban League focused on the needs of black urban dwellers long before it became fashionable to do so in the late 1960s.\textsuperscript{22}

With the proliferation of civil rights organizations in the postwar era and the agreed-upon legislative goals of the movement completed by August 1965, the question of “Who Speaks for the Negro?” became even more unanswerable as leaders divided over the escalation of the Vietnam War.\textsuperscript{23} Martin Luther King, Jr.’s decision to join the antiwar movement in the spring of 1967 split the “Big Six” leadership down the middle as he joined the young radicals of CORE and SNCC while the older “Big Six” members, Randolph, Wilkins, and Young continued to support the administration. The NAACP leadership, in particular, fervently maintained, somewhat disingenuously given its history, that civil rights organizations had no mandate from their supporters to critique U.S. foreign policy.\textsuperscript{24} To do so they argued, was a “tactical error.” As early as the summer of 1965 Wilkins, who claimed that civil rights and the war were “separate
issues," informed White House officials that a "considerable" amount of his time was being spent keeping the peace movement out of the civil rights movement.  

This study of the forces that kept the civil rights movement out of the peace movement in the Johnson years is linked to at least three interpretive schools in diplomatic history. First, it is linked to Vietnam post-revisionism by its focus on the close relationship between domestic politics and foreign policy. Second, as part of the corporatist tradition, the federal government must share the stage with non-state actors, in this case civil rights leaders. But it is corporatism with a twist. Rather than forming a partnership with non-state actors to implement U.S. foreign policy objectives, the state enlisted non-state actors to maintain the support of an important domestic constituency for an embattled foreign policy objective. The exploration of the difficulties, opportunities, and consequences of such a partnership in a time of domestic and international crisis is this study's heart. Finally, it is another step in the examination of race and U.S. foreign policy which, like corporatism, expands the array of foreign policy influences outside the State Department, the White House, and the Pentagon.

The post-revisionist phase of the Vietnam War historiography that began in the early 1980s has already chronicled the close interrelationship between presidential foreign and domestic policy decisionmaking in the Johnson years. Larry Berman and Lloyd Gardner, in particular, have chronicled the degree to which Lyndon Johnson
equated the success of the War in Vietnam with the success of the Great Society.
Berman even suggested that the progression of troop deployments and military funding
during the war can be charted against the progress of the Great Society legislation
through Congress. As Vietnam post-revisionists continue to explore the
interrelationship between domestic and foreign policy decision-making that peaked
during the Johnson administration, African Americans as policy critics and advisors, as
soldiers and symbols, as civil rights activists and beneficiaries will be an integral part of
the new narrative.

The race and culture paradigm enabled historians to expand the boundaries of
traditional diplomatic histories that focus only on foreign policy decisionmakers in the
White House, at the Pentagon, or in the State Department, venues where African
Americans, the perennial “outgroup” in American life, have been excluded. One
example is the exploration of U.S. foreign policy and culture, in particular the concepts
of race and racial ideology, introduced by Michael Hunt and John Dower in the mid-
1980s. Hunt’s Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy examined the ways in which racial
ideology shaped the formulation and implementation of U.S. foreign policy over a
broad spectrum of U.S. foreign policy decisions dating back the colonial era.
Meanwhile Dower’s War Without Mercy examined the cultural and racial influences
that shaped the conduct of war in the Pacific during World War II. Dower concluded
that in military engagements that pitted Western powers against peoples of color “race
colors all these conflicts and in ways that often find expression in language, imagery,
and purportedly empirical analysis.  Dower’s analysis can also prove useful for exploring not only the racial aspects of the war between the U.S. and Vietnam, but also for bringing African Americans into the Vietnam historiography by examining the way in which both the Vietnamese and the U.S. governments factored in the presence of African American soldiers and events related to the civil rights movement into their war propaganda.

In recent years diplomatic historians like Plummer, Penny Von Eschen, Gerald Horne, and Michael Krenn have used the race and culture paradigm to explore how African Americans have responded to U.S. foreign policy, their attempts to influence it, their involvement in its dissemination, and the link between racial progress at home and military conflicts abroad. In addition, historians such as Mary Dudziak, James L. Roark, Plummer, and Carol Anderson have demonstrated that the link between U.S. foreign policy and the progression and direction of the civil rights movement in the early Cold War era can be used to incorporate African Americans into U.S. diplomatic history. These works have created the foundation for the inclusion of African Americans within the Vietnam historiography by U.S. diplomatic historians in the twenty-first century.

Since, as Shabazz and Starks noted, African Americans have been largely absent from traditional diplomatic histories of the Vietnam conflict, the first wave of black Vietnam scholarship was written by journalists and scholars from other disciplines. In the early 1970s Clyde Taylor and Robert Mullen, professors of English
and communications, respectively, started the black Vietnam historiography with volumes that by focused entirely on black antiwar rhetoric. Taylor produced an anthology of antiwar poetry and prose while Mullen began a series of works analyzing black antiwar rhetoric. Later volumes by Mullen began to incorporate military history, setting the direction that would define the genre. For many years, the focus of research on African Americans and the Vietnam War was limited largely to African American soldiers abroad and African American antiwar rhetoric at home.

Fueled, perhaps, by the central role that African American soldiers played in the Vietnam conflict, the experiences of black soldiers remains the best-researched aspect of the black Vietnam historiography. Jack Foner’s Blacks and the Military in American History in 1974 was one of the first military histories to include black Vietnam soldiers. And in 1984 journalist Wallace Terry produced Bloods: An Oral History of the Vietnam War by Black Veterans, one of the first volumes to concentrate exclusively on black Vietnam veterans. But these and other military histories included little analysis of the civilian response to the war leaving the next phase of the blacks and Vietnam War historiography to be written by historians of the antiwar movement.

But the focus on African American antiwar rhetoric dominated research on the response of African American civilians. Even so, African Americans, as a consistent presence, were as absent from mainstream historical narratives of the antiwar movement as they were from the antiwar movement itself in the 1960s. Despite
sporadic cameo appearances by Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, SNCC, and the Black Panthers, compelling forces like the rise of black nationalism within the student-led branch of the civil rights movement and ideological and strategic differences separated the civil rights and student antiwar movements throughout the 1960s. This was so despite their overlapping genealogies in leftist political organizations, their shared experiences in the disappointing voting rights campaigns of 1963 and 1964, and the thin thread of internationalism in both movements.

Of book-length antiwar movement histories, *Peace Now! American Society and the Ending of the Vietnam War*, a 1999 monograph by British historian Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones is the most significant contribution to the black Vietnam historiography to date. Even then, in order to fill out the slim volume Jeffreys-Jones broadened his focus to include the antiwar activism of women's groups, college students, and organized labor as well as African Americans. Nonetheless *Peace Now!* was among the first published works to acknowledge that each of these groups initially adopted a pro-war stance and that divisions remained even after they officially joined the antiwar movement. It also offers an indication of the evolution of antiwar sentiment and activism among within these groups. For example Jeffreys-Jones noted that Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm "gave low priority" to the war in Vietnam until she realized that the Nixon administration "intended to spend on guns, not butter." And in his account of a meeting between President Nixon and the congressional black caucus
in the spring of 1971, he notes that of sixty demands presented most dealt with "the rectification of injustices to black people at home." The "primary foreign policy recommendation," a call for U.S. withdrawal from the Vietnam War by the end of the year, was in response to a "'significant' increase in black discontent with the war in the past two years." Nonetheless, Jeffreys-Jones concludes that African Americans, like women, labor groups, and students, staged a series of "spectacular revolts" that prevented politicians from finding an enduring formula of suppression. But given his own admission that "the number of African American protesters remained small," one has to wonder how Jeffreys-Jones defined "spectacular."38

Overall, the best scholarships to date regarding the African American response to the Vietnam War has been in the form of journal articles and chapters in edited volumes. Among U.S. historians Peter Levy's 1990 essay "Blacks and Vietnam" still ranks among the most comprehensive discussion of African Americans and the Vietnam War. At only twenty pages long, his discussion of each topic was necessarily brief, but what he lacks in depth he makes up for in breadth. In addition to black soldiers, Levy also included brief sections on the civil rights movement, black public opinion, blacks and the antiwar movement, the financial and governmental repercussions for black supporters and protesters in the civil rights movement, and the legacy of the war for African Americans.39

By the mid-1990s articles by two British historians of the U.S. civil rights movement had made significant contributions to the black Vietnam historiography as well. Adam Fairclough, the author of a 1987 history of the SCLC has produced two
essays, the first on King and the Vietnam War in 1984 and the second five years later on Vietnam and the decline of the civil rights movement, that provide an excellent starting point for any scholar pursuing the topic. Fairclough’s work is generally thorough and well-researched, but like much of the work by U.S. civil rights historians, it is King-focused. Nonetheless, Fairclough’s research and analysis are much improved over earlier anti-war literature that presented Wilkins and Young as mere as presidential courtesans or simply counterpoints to King. Still there is still no differentiation between the two organizations or the goals and perspectives of Young and Wilkins. In addition, while Fairclough makes clear that by 1965 the NAACP and the Urban League had the strongest ties to the federal government of the “Big Five” organizations, he overlooks their continued strong ties to the African American community.

The exception to the King-centered analysis is the work of Manfred Berg, who is completing a much-needed history of the NAACP. Berg’s 1997 essay on the NAACP and the Vietnam War in the Johnson years is path-breaking in its subject matter and detail, and goes a long way toward Berg’s goal of shedding “some light on the other side of the story.” Berg’s work is a particularly important contribution to the Vietnam/civil rights historiography given the NAACP’s prominence in the civil rights movement. Unlike the anti-war tracts, Berg connected Wilkins to the organization he led and explored the “bonds of mutual loyalty” other members of the NAACP hierarchy, and President Johnson. A comparable analysis of the Urban League and the Vietnam War has yet to be written.41
For the reasons cited earlier, few diplomatic historians have explored fully African American support for the Vietnam War. But a handful, Brenda Gayle Plummer, whose work was discussed earlier along with Thomas Borstelmann, Gerald Gill, and Jonathan Seth Rosenberg have presented the complexity of African American opinion on the Vietnam War as part of larger discussions of the African American response to U.S. foreign policy. Borstelmann’s 2001 *The Cold War and the Color Line* is the latest diplomatic history addition to the racial analysis of U.S. foreign policy and is presented completely from the U.S. government perspective. When he deals with African Americans and the Vietnam War, he, like most others, focuses solely on the opposition. The positions of the Urban League and NAACP are referenced only in opposition to King’s Riverside Church speech criticizing the war. The NAACP and Urban League’s entire response to the war is boiled down to a couple of sentences based on a single secondary source.

Rosenberg discussed the Vietnam War in a brief epilogue to his 1997 survey of civil right leaders and U.S. foreign policy entitled “How Far the Promised Land?”: World Affairs and the American Civil Rights Movement from World War I to Vietnam.” In the yet-to-be-published dissertation Rosenberg acknowledged the diversity of opinions on the war within the civil rights community writing that the war in Vietnam “would expose and create fissures in the civil rights movement… [and] prove more divisive than any issue the movement had confronted in decades; few foreign affairs matters had ever caused such discord.”42 Rosenberg noted but did not explore the positions of civil rights leaders who chose to support the administration
during the war. While he does present more of the NAACP’s position on the war, again it is presented only in response to those who opposed it, like SNCC, CORE, and King.

Gill’s 1985 unpublished dissertation, “Afro-American Opposition to the United States’ Wars of the Twentieth Century: Dissent, Discontent and Disinterest” provides the most complete discussion of African American supporters at that time. In a full chapter on the intraracial debate over black antiwar sentiment, Gill wrote that “support for the administration’s policies in Vietnam, stated explicitly or not, came from many black liberals, moderates and conservatives during the years 1965 to 1967. Nearly all were unanimous in their praise of the president’s domestic policies and transferred that support to the administration’s foreign policies.” Gill attributed the support to political pragmatism and patriotism. But despite the fact that both the NAACP and Urban League Papers and the papers of Young and Wilkins were listed in his bibliography, not a single citation in the chapter on the intraracial debate came from any of these sources.

This dissertation seeks to expand the research of British historians like Manfred Berg, Adam Fairclough, and Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, and U.S. historians like Gerald Gill and Jonathan Seth Rosenberg who have already, to a limited degree, acknowledged the fact that African American opinion on the Vietnam War during the Johnson years may have been more publicly, consciously, and sharply divided than during any other twentieth century conflict. It seeks to add much-needed balance to the narrative of blacks and the Vietnam War by exploring the reasons why a
significant number of African Americans supported the war during the Johnson years and by assessing the consequences of that support. And finally, by using the NAACP and the Urban League’s relationship with the Johnson administration to examine African American support for the war, it seeks to connect the Vietnam and civil rights historiographies by presenting a more complex portrait of an African American community caught between the War on Poverty and the War in Vietnam.

The more monochromatic portrait of African Americans and the Vietnam War that has dominated for the last three decades has for basic flaws. The first is a widespread lack of temporal specificity that mars even the best studies. By failing to clarify the chronology of their “representative” spokesperson, antiwar scholars presented a much broader base of opposition than actually existed in the 1960s. In many cases, individuals who either did not come to power or did not come out against the war until the Nixon administration were presumed to have done so much earlier. For example, Representatives Shirley Chisholm (D-New York) and Ronald Dellums (D-California), who are among the list of most frequently cited black antiwar leaders, did not enter Congress until 1969 and 1971. And this tendency to blend the protest of the 1970s into the 1960s also artificially flattens the evolution of African American opinion on the war, creating what appear to be contradictory statements. For example, Jeffreys-Jones writes that “the majority of African Americans gave the war their wholehearted support” and that the Vietnam War “was deeply objectionable from the African American point of view.”45 His sole support for the latter statement was a 1974 assertion by Roger Wilkins that “it would be hard to find a serious black in the
United States who does not believe that the war was profoundly racist."46 And while Wilkins' assertion may very well have been true in 1974, this clearly was not the case in the 1960s. Nonetheless flattening the timeline enabled scholars to avoid wrestling with the question of Floyd McKissick's, Stokely Carmichael's, Bayard Rustin's or even Martin Luther King's relative influence in the black community in the mid-1960s by failing to place "representative spokespersons" within their historical context.

This is particularly obvious with more radical antiwar activists like Muhammad Ali, Malcolm X, Floyd McKissick, and Stokely Carmichael but is also true of more mainstream figures like Bayard Rustin and Martin Luther King, Jr. A perfect illustration of this tendency is antiwar historian David Levy's claim that "Influential civil rights leaders--Bayard Rustin, Floyd McKissick, Stokely Carmichael, and others--argued that young blacks should be fighting for freedom in the United States and not in Vietnam" 47 Levy never explains how he defines influential. He never mentions that CORE and SNCC, the two organizations headed by McKissick and Carmichael respectively, are the two smallest groups in the "Big Five." He never notes that a 1966 survey of both rank-and-file and leading blacks on black leadership, the rank-and file put Elijah Muhammad, Floyd McKissick, and Stokely Carmichael at the bottom of their list.48 He never mentions that for most of the 1960s, Bayard Rustin was known primarily to civil rights "insiders." As a former member of the Young Communist League in the 1930s and a homosexual once arrested for lewd conduct, Rustin was prohibited from taking on more visible roles that might have endangered the movement.
Furthermore when King publicly joined the antiwar movement in 1967, Rustin publicly urged him to re-evaluate his anti-war stance since “getting decent jobs, housing and education is harder than integrating lunch counters, we need to redouble our efforts, not dilute or divert them.” Similarly, Rustin wrote that by urging black men to resist the draft, Carmichael and McKissick only demonstrated their “own alienation from ghetto youth... [since] so many of them tragically see [military service] as their only way out.” Instead, Rustin urged peace activists to join the civil rights movement to create better conditions at home since he could not in good conscience discourage poor, ill-housed, unemployed African American men from taking advantage of the opportunities for betterment provided by military service.\footnote{49}

A similar litmus test of historical context must be applied to the influence of the oft-cited Muhammad Ali and Malcolm X. Though widely admired today, both Ali and Malcolm X were extremely controversial figures among African Americans in the 1960s, having rejected their family names and the dominant religion of an overwhelmingly Christian African American community. In the 1960s, when Ali’s fiercest battles in and outside the ring and his vindication by the Supreme Court still lay ahead of him, he was a much more controversial figure among African Americans whose brothers, sons, and husbands were fighting in Vietnam in record numbers. Similarly, Alex Haley, Malcolm X’s collaborator on his autobiography, wrote

> When I came first to know Malcolm, my perceptions were that most white people--probably nearly all, from the exposure I had--ranged from being very, very apprehensive about Malcolm to hating Malcolm, the image of Malcolm which had been purveyed by the
media, of course. That was not too far afield of probably the majority of black people also. Nowadays you might hear a lot of people talking about how they followed him and so forth, but my perception at that time was that the large majority were frightened by the things Malcolm said.

Of course, it is difficult to accurately measure an individual’s influence, especially in the television age, but scholar must devote some attention to ascertaining a “representative” figure’s relative influence before deeming that person “influential.”

One of the most common ways to determine influence is through the examination of contemporary media coverage in newspapers and magazines. But the uncritical evaluation of these sources is the third shortcoming of most depictions of African American attitudes regarding the war. Presidential historian Doris Kearns Goodwin admitted that, in retrospect, media-crowned militants turned out to be “more myth than reality” as studies indicate “that even at the height of the radical activity, the old leaders still retained the overwhelming support of the Negro community.”

Yet like Goodwin, many black scholars of the anti-war movement, particularly the master’s degree candidates and non-historians, were misled by a singular and uncritical reliance on statements preserved by the popular mainstream media of the day to gauge black war views. In doing so they overstated the support in the African American community for media-savvy, oratorically-gifted figures whose biggest following consisted of and had the largest impact on the white news media.

Civil rights leaders were all too aware of this problem. Whitney Young often lamented “the inability of the white person to distinguish significant Negro leadership”
from those who produce little more than rhetoric. Wilkins complained, “Every militant who comes up and stamps his foot... says a dirty word... and tells the mayor to go you-know-where... is instantly the harbinger of a new trend.” James Farmer went further concluding that the white press irresponsibly publicized verbose would-be leader “partly out of ignorance, and sometimes, I suspect, out of a deliberate attempt to create conflict within Negro leadership.”

Farmer, a keen observer-participant in the movement, explained that in the early 1960s, it was “easy for a man to become a Negro leader-- or be accepted as one. If he makes speeches which are militant enough, which capture the press, then he becomes recognized at least temporarily, as a Negro leader-- on the basis of pure verbalism-- without having any following, without any organization, without taking any action.” Farmer cited his friend Malcolm X as an example—a man who, according to David Southern, had appeared on television more than any other black leader in 1963. In 1964, shortly before Malcolm X’s assassination, Wyatt Tee Walker claimed that “the Muslim movement and its impact on race relations is almost nil. It’s a specter, a paper tiger that the white press has created. Fifty per cent of the Negroes never even heard of the Black Muslims, they don’t know who Malcolm X is.”

Such comments were not as self-serving as they may seem. More familiar with the long tradition of black oratory and more in-touch with the black community than “in-for-the-day” white reporters, black leaders were less than sanguine about the accuracy of the picture of black leadership the mainstream media presented.
civil rights leaders reached similar conclusions. White House aide Clifford Alexander also despaired at "the creation of heroes, the creation of spokesmen...by a cloistered group of white folks" with "insufficient judgment to make that choice."\textsuperscript{60} And Young suspected that ulterior motives were making it even more difficult since everyone in the movement knew that division in the new era of militance was compelling news. "The best way to get publicity in the white media is to appear to be in conflict," he explained, "If you're supportive, it's not newsworthy."

But what is "newsworthy" is not always historically accurate. Despite the media frenzy surrounding black nationalists like Malcom X and Stokely Carmichael in the mid-1960s a 1966 survey found little support for black nationalism among rank-and-file (63 per cent disapproved and 32 percent were unsure of it). Although approval increased among low income, non-Southern blacks, from 5 to 9 percent, the percentage of disapproval increased even more to 68 per cent. The highest approval rating for black nationalism was among "Negro community leaders" at 18 per cent, but the disapproval rating was still three and a half times greater at 62 per cent.\textsuperscript{61} Although Paul Seabury found in 1968 "that among college-educated Negroes, the rate of dissent appears slightly higher than among their white equivalents," this group represented a very small percentage of the overall African American population at this time. Nonetheless, the antiwar views of a college-educated, West Indian, philosophy major like Stokely Carmichael are still considered far more representative of and influential with the African American community by antiwar writers than those of the "middle-class" leadership of the NAACP and the Urban League.\textsuperscript{62} Perhaps it is
because this population may also have also been the most visible to the white antiwar activists who would later write histories of the war and to newspapermen looking for the most interesting angle.

Critical attention to historical context should apply to African American media as well. Antiwar scholars have paid little attention to the circulation, intended audience, political history, likely degree of influence, or reputation of the contemporary African American sources they cited as representative of or influential regarding African American opinion on the war. For example, The Liberator and Freedomways are the two most frequently cited African American journals conveying antiwar sentiment. Published between 1961 to 1970, the Liberator had a circulation of 20,000 and was a pro-Marxist proponent of black nationalism. Similarly, “Marxist ideology helped to shape” Freedomways, according to journalism professor Roland Wolseley, because of the political affiliations of its Communist editor-in-chief, Shirley Graham, the wife of W.E.B. Du Bois. Also started in 1961, Freedomways’ circulation never topped 9,000. Why then should the articles in Freedomways and the Liberator be considered more accurate barometers, or even as equal reflections, of black community opinion as magazines with national circulations between 350,000 and nearly a million? Clearly the working-class African Americans, whose views Freedomways and the Liberator supposedly represented, were more inclined to pick up a copy of the more mainstream Jet or read Ebony magazines at their local carry-out or barber shop than to subscribe to “the premier black radical journal of the sixties.”
Based on sheer circulation numbers alone, the potential reach of the later dwarf the former.  

Created in 1945 to be the black version of *Life* magazine, Walter C. Daniel, author of *Black Journals of the United States* called *Ebony* a "veritable library of the second half of the twentieth century from the black perspective." Still the most popular magazine in the Chicago-based, John H. Johnson publishing empire, the monthly picture magazine celebrated African American achievers in sports, entertainment, business, and government. Aimed at a black middle-class audience but read by all classes, by the 1960s it was a most reliable national source of news on the civil rights movement and also began to address the socio-political concerns of the black community through articles written by the leading African American intellectuals, thinkers, leaders, and journalists of the day. Circulation doubled from nearly five hundred thousand in 1958 to nearly one million in 1968.

*Jet*, a "mini-sized weekly photo-news review," was created in 1951 to provide a quick summary of the week’s news and pictures in an easy-to-carry, easy-to-read, and inexpensive format. It reported on and was read by an extremely broad cross section of black life in America. Regular features include a bathing suit-clad centerfold, the top twenty selling albums and singles by African American artists, wedding photos, a list of blacks appearing on television during the week, and celebrity gossip. Although *Jet* circulation declined from four hundred fifty thousand in 1958 to three hundred fifty thousand in 1968, both *Jet* and *Ebony* magazines remained the most widely read national publications in the African American community in the late
1950s and 1960s. And while wide circulation did not automatically guarantee an accurate representation of dominant African American sentiment, it indicated broad appeal and therefore influence. In addition, those who disparage Ebony as being too conservative to represent the African American point of view should read the April 1966 editorial called “The ‘Acceptable’ Negro” which concludes that

Basically, the Negro acceptable to whites today, as in the past is a high class Uncle Tom who is willing to sacrifice a little of his manhood in order to hold down a good job in comfortable surroundings. And, again as in the past, the ‘acceptable’ Negro will delay the final and proper solution of the race problem in the United States. So long as the Negro strives for acceptance by whites, he is selling himself short, for acceptance means that the white man is permitting equality to an equal citizen. Such acceptance or permission is an unnecessary condescension. The Negro is a citizen and he should not have to go one step further than any other citizen to secure his rights. Until this is true, the race problem will be with us.⁶⁵

Finally, many antiwar scholars misinterpret polling data. For example, many anti-war writers assume that because a higher percentage of African Americans than whites answered “yes” to the question “do you think the U.S. made a mistake sending troops to fight in Vietnam?” they also sought “quick disengagement.” But the opposite may have been true. A 1968 survey found that “among those who viewed the war as a mistake almost as many favored escalation as were for withdrawal.” Although 1:6,y 1969, in addition, 80 per cent of African American respondents agreed that it had been a “mistake” for the U.S. to become involved in the war, only 36 per cent favored immediate withdrawal.⁶⁶
This dissertation seeks to alter the record by correcting some this flawed analysis. It seeks to incorporate the evolution of African American attitudes regarding the war to the historiography and, re-interpret African American opinion within the historical context of the mid-1960s. It moves past a King-centered analysis to encompass broader African American opinion, since a full examination of African American opinion on the Vietnam War must include the entire community, not just the views of a Nobel Prize-winning, third generation, southern Baptist minister with a doctoral degree or student radicals advocating armed resistance.\textsuperscript{67} And it seeks to place the prowar civil rights leaders back in the historical canon of African American opinion on the war.

This study also seeks to look beyond popular contemporary sources to better understand the historical context and how African American "spokesmen" operated within it. Finally, since antiwar discourse makes up the bulk of the evidence to support black opposition to the war, this dissertation also examines the wording of the rhetoric of black antiwar protest to find that it was both quantitatively and qualitatively different from that of their white counterparts.\textsuperscript{68} Even when protest finally appeared on black college campuses in 1967, the fact that the draft, not the president, was their target, illustrates that NAACP branch campaigns against lily-white draft boards may have been more in sync with African American students for whom anti-war, at least initially, meant anti-draft than the Black Panther notion of solidarity with the Vietnamese.\textsuperscript{69}
By presenting the positions taken by the NAACP and the Urban League with more accuracy and specificity, this dissertation also attempts to illustrate the variety of reasons why African Americans supported the administration in Vietnam during the Johnson administration. As Jonathan Rosenberg and others have documented, the NAACP juxtaposed world affairs and the struggle for black equality in the United States as far back as World War I. Several of its founding members were well-known anti-imperialists and pacifists, and W.E. B. Du Bois, an avid pan-Africanist, served as the organization’s intellectual guide for its first quarter century. So the assertion of Manfred Berg, Rosenberg, and others that Wilkins’ “separate issues” doctrine and his claim that the NAACP had no mandate to critique foreign policy “involved a great deal of moral and intellectual hypocrisy,” rings true, given that organization’s history.

But the case is not as clear-cut with respect to Whitney Young and the Urban League. The Urban League had no historical precedent for critiquing U.S. foreign policy. With no intellectual giant like W.E.B. Du Bois to promote a Pan-African perspective or a national director with a broad international vision like Walter White, the Urban League maintained a decidedly domestic focus for most of its existence. Because it concerned itself primarily with solving the “day-to-day economic problems of the urban poor,” the Urban League’s prowar stance seemed more justifiable and less hypocritical given its history and goals.

The following chapters present the myriad influences that shaped African American support for the Vietnam War in the Johnson years. The first two explore
historical forces while the final two focus events during the course of the Johnson presidency. Chapter one will survey presidential relations with civil rights leaders and the African American response to U.S. military engagements against the backdrop of the evolving modern civil rights movement and the U.S. commitment in Vietnam. This chapter will draw a clear distinction between Johnson and his predecessors and reconnect both the civil rights movement and the U.S. commitment in Vietnam to their roots in the 1940s. Understanding presidential attitudes toward civil rights and the African American response to military conflicts prior to the Johnson administration is important if we are to put the African American response to the Vietnam War in perspective.

The second chapter will provide context and depth to African American support for the Vietnam War in the Johnson years through the organizational histories of the NAACP and the National Urban League and the personal and professional histories of their leadership relative to the Cold War, the civil rights movement, and Lyndon Johnson prior to his presidency. It seeks to explain how and why a southern president and the two largest civil rights organizations would form an unprecedented alliance when so many of their predecessors and contemporaries did not. It is the strength of this bond that formed the basis of the NAACP’s, the Urban League’s, and the African American community’s continued support for the Johnson administration policies in Vietnam after the military build-up began in 1965.

Chapter three will explore the alliance between the NAACP and Urban League and the Johnson White House in the three years between the start of the Johnson
presidency and early 1967, when Martin Luther King, Jr.’s decision to join the antiwar movement significantly altered the relationship between moderate civil rights leaders and the White House and between the civil rights and antiwar movements. It will also explore the relationship between the mainstream civil rights community, the African American community, and the Johnson White House in the context of the end of the legislative phase of the civil rights movement and the beginning of the military build-up in Southeast Asia in 1965 and the de-escalation of the War on Poverty and the rise of black nationalism in 1966. This period represented an era of unprecedented legislative progress, collaboration with the White House, and fragmentation for the civil rights movement, all of which set the framework for the African American response to the war in the final two years of the Johnson presidency.

Chapter four will focus on the NAACP and the Urban League’s relationship to the Vietnam War, with the civil rights community, the broader African American community, and the White House in light of the rapid changes in the political landscape for moderate civil rights organizations in the wake of Dr. King’s decision to join the antiwar movement, urban riots, and other events leading up to the 1968 presidential race. It explores the first manifestations of significant black antiwar protest and examines the effects of the pro-administration stance of Wilkins and Young on their respective organizations.

Finally, the concluding chapter will draw on the information presented in the preceding chapters to offer answers to the following questions: Were the positions taken by the NAACP and Urban League on the war indicative of a leadership so out-
of-touch with mainstream African American opinion on the war that their support was merely an expression of their own self-interest or a result of White House manipulation? Or were they reflections of a significant strain of African American sentiment regarding the war and the presidency of Lyndon Johnson? To what degree did the White House orchestrate African American support for the war? Were specific benefits or rewards anticipated by or promised to civil rights leaders who supported U.S. policy in Southeast Asia? If so, were these benefits shared with the broader African American community? Finally, were African Americans, the Urban League and the NAACP right to stick with Johnson on Vietnam?
ENDNOTES


2 Whitney Young, Oral History, LBJ, 8.


6 Memo from Fred Panzer to LBJ, May 19, 1967, WHCF, Box 348, Folder: PR 16 4/21/67-5/20/67, LBJ. For other polls indicating the African American community’s support for Johnson’s policies in Southeast Asia and in response to Dr. King’s antiviet activism see William Brink and Louis Harris, Black and White: A Study of U.S. Racial Attitudes Today (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), 272-4. Also see two Chicago Daily Defender polls in the April of 1967 from which the newspaper concluded that “On the whole [those polled] expressed a willingness to go along -- albeit blindly -- with the President’s view of how the Viet problem should be handled.” “Should We Stay in Asia? How Negroes Feel,” The Chicago Daily Defender, April 1-7, 1967, 1, 3 and “Negro Opinion on Viet Is Shifting,” Chicago Daily Defender, National Edition, April 22-28, 1967, 1, 3. The Chicago Daily Defender polls are important corroboration since Alfred Hero contends that “a significant fraction of Negroes have tended to provide different replies to the same questions, particularly those related to race relations, when speaking with Negro interviewers rather than white ones” with the opinions expressed to black interviewers likely being more accurate. Also see Hero, “American Negroes,” 222, 231, 251-2.


14 Dennis Dickerson supports his assertion that Young’s moderate views reflected the integrationist vision held by most middle- and working-class African Americans by documenting Young’s support in black churches, fraternal, service, business and professional organizations, women’s groups, and educational institutions. Dennis Dickerson, Militant Mediator: Whitney M. Young, Jr. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998.)

15 Senator Edward Brooke, who was elected as a moderate dove in 1966, switched sides during the Johnson administration, preferring to refer to himself as an “owl” on Vietnam. John Henry Cutler, Ed Brooke: Biography of A Senator (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1972), 233.


18 Meier and Bracey, “NAACP as a Reform Movement,” 27; Also Meier and Rudwick, “Organizational Structure and Goal Succession,” 23; Adrian F. Aveni, “Organizational Linkages and Resource
Mobilization: The Significance of Linkage Strength and Breadth.” Sociological Quarterly 19 (Spring 1978), 196.

19 Warren, Who Speaks, 421. Ironically about that same time the NAACP was vehemently condemning black nationalism and black separatism its national board joined its local and national administration in becoming virtually “all black and it has remained that way ever since.” Meier and Bracey, “The NAACP as a Reform Movement.” 29.


23 Of course “Who speaks for the Negro?” is the great unanswerable at the root of this discussion. What publications, what civil rights leader, what writers, what organizations? Psychologist Kenneth Clark, civil rights leader Whitney Young, and writer Robert Penn Warren all posed the question ultimately reaching the same conclusion. No single individual or group can speak for all African Americans, “just as no one political party can speak for all citizens in a democracy or no one religion can satisfy the needs of all individuals.” Clark contends that the diversity of organizations and leaders should be “viewed as a sign of democracy, health.” Clark, “The Civil Rights Movement,” 265; Whitney Young, To Be Equal column, “Some Questions and Answers,” May 26, 1965, NUL Papers, Part II, Series V, Box 48, Folder: Public Relations Files, 1957-67, Speeches, Articles, and Interviews, 1957-66, LOC. Robert Penn Warren, Who Speaks for the Negro?

24 Robert S. Browne, “The Freedom Movement and the War in Vietnam,” Freedomways 5 (Fall 1965), 472. For the NAACP’s long history of critiquing U.S. foreign policy see Rosenberg, “How Far the Promised Land?”; Brenda Gayle Plummer, Rising Wind, and Marxist historian Herbert Aptheker’s, Martin Luther King, Vietnam and Civil Rights (New York: New Outlook Publishers, June 1967). In the latter, Aptheker, though clearly partisan, makes an excellent case that Wilkins’ assertion was historically inaccurate. For an in-depth discussion of the NAACP’s position on Vietnam and Wilkins’ separate issues doctrine regarding the Vietnam War in the Johnson years see Manfred Berg, “Guns, Butter, and Civil


35. In chapter two of The War at Home (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1973), Thomas Powers does an excellent job of tracing the roots of antiwar movement back to young whites disillusioned with government and contradictions of American life based on their experiences as volunteers for SNCC’s Freedom Summer campaign in 1964. DeBenedetti and Chatfield argue that the antiwar activism followed the same trajectory as civil rights radicalism. They argue that when the peace movement outgrew its pacifist origins it became fragmented and ineffectual due to the political and cultural storms of the 1960s and an infusion of new radical, young members fresh from the civil rights movement. Having apparently stayed long enough to learn the lessons of self-immolation before being ejected by SNCC and CORE, these students brought to the antiwar movement a flagrant anti-Americanism and cultural rebelliousness that alienated a large percentage of the American public. DeBenedetti and Chatfield, An American Ordeal, 110-12, 138; Levy, “Blacks and the Vietnam War,” 222-3.

36 Jeffreys-Jones, Peace Now, 131.


38. Jeffreys-Jones, Peace Now, 121.


45. Jefferies-Jones, Peace Now, 95.

46 Ibid, Roger Wilkins, “What African Means to Blacks.” Foreign Affairs 15 (Summer 1974), 137. Wilkins also wrote “if you ask most knowledgeable blacks who was the best President for blacks, most of them will answer Lyndon Johnson.” Roger Wilkins, A Man’s Life (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 229. Also see Lawson, “Mixing Moderation,” 106.

47 Levy, The Debate over Vietnam, 112. For these reasons, Roy Wilkins attempted to prevent Rustin from organizing the 1963 March on Washington. In a deal engineered by Whitney Young, A. Philip Randolph was made titular head of the March with the power to name his own deputy, Rustin. Weiss, Whitney Young, 105-6.

48 King was the clear favorite among the rank-and-file with an 88 per cent approval rating. The next five were James Meredith, Jackie Robinson, Roy Wilkins, and Dick Gregory. Black leaders also listed King first followed by A. Philip Randolph, Thurgood Marshall, and James Farmer and Whitney Young who tied fourth with 70 per cent approval ratings. William Brink, and Louis Harris, Black and White (New York: A Clarion Book/Simon and Schuster, 1967), 241-2.


51 Kearns, Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream, 304.

52. Academic studies of both the black and white popular press during the Johnson years concluded that neither reflected public opinion data on the war. In his study comparing Vietnam coverage in Newsweek, Time, and U.S. News and World Report, Richard Pfeffer found that each magazine's basic position on the war remained unchanged between 1965 and 1968 despite the shifts from support to opposition by the American public. Newsweek was critical, Time was moderately critical and U.S. News was stridently supportive. Richard N. Pfeffer, “The Popular Periodical Press and the Vietnam War, 1954-1968,” M.A. Thesis, University of Louisville, 1978. Wanda Herndon Murphy reached a similar conclusion in her

53 In 1965 Wyatt Tee Walker, Whitney Young, and James Farmer all cited Malcolm X as a perfect example of this phenomenon to journalist Robert Penn Warren. Robert Penn Warren, Who Speaks for the Negro? (New York: Random House, 1965), 231, 161, 196-7. In 1967 David Halberstam complained of the "increasing difficulty in covering racial news." He wrote that "each time you were with an established leader like Roy Wilkins, he would complain how the press invented radical leaders, created by the white press because of its guilt feelings. The next day you might be in Harlem talking with one of the more radical Negroes, and he would give a bitter discourse on how the white press played up only Whitney Young and Roy Wilkins; [how] the white press was out to make the Negroes think that this mild leadership was all they had." David Halberstam, "The Second Coming of Martin Luther King." Harper's (August 1967), 43.


55 Wilkins quoted in "The Other 97%", Time 11 August 1967, 12.


57 David Southern, Gunnar Myrdal and Black-white Relations (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 238.


60 Clifford Alexander, OH, LBJL, Tape 3, 21.


71. Among the most active internationalists were founders were Lillian Wald, Jane Addams, John Haynes Holmes, Mary White Ovington, and Oswald Garrison Villard. The first NAACP Board President, Moorfield Storey, was also President of the American Anti-Imperialist League for more than half of his 19- year tenure. For more on the international concerns of the NAACP's founding members see Charles Flint Kellogg, *NAACP: A History of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People*, vol. 1, 1909-1920 (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), chapters 1-3, and for a first-hand account see Mary Ovington White, "The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People," *The Journal of Negro History* 9 (April 1924): 107-116.

CHAPTER 1

"SO MUCH DIFFERENT THAN WHAT WE’VE BEEN USED TO": THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR THE VIETNAM WAR IN THE JOHNSON YEARS

"Nothing will strengthen the heart of Negroes more than a meeting in the White House with the President... If the President hears the case... whatever disposition is made—the fact that it gets before him will have favorable psychological reactions among Negroes, whether the practical results will be all that we can hope for or not."

T. Arnold Hill, National Urban League, 1930

"And when I met all the time with the heads of the black organizations, I knew I was helping those organizations grow in the eyes of their constituents. Why, if Whitney Young or Roy Wilkins could hang a picture of me on their office walls, shaking hands with them, they’d be in good with their people for some time."

Lyndon B. Johnson

"It’s a funny thing about black folks. Any white person who showed us a little concern, and I say it with no reservations, just sweep black people off their feet. And there’s a very simple answer to that: because all our lives we’d never seen anyone give a damn... And when one shows that he or she is concerned about us, just a little bit, it’s so much different than what we’ve been used to... blacks go overboard for them."

Charles Evers

This chapter will briefly examine two related postwar topics in order to provide a historical context for African American support of the Vietnam War in the Johnson years. Presidential attitudes toward civil rights and African American attitudes toward overseas military engagements since 1940 shaped the African American response to the Vietnam War in the Johnson years. Their evolution provides a basis for understanding why Lyndon Johnson was the key to African
African American support for the war. The first, a legacy of presidential opposition or ambivalence toward civil rights reform positions Lyndon Johnson to capture African American support by championing civil rights. In addition, the African American response to U.S. involvement in World War II and Korea suggests that their opposition to the Vietnam conflict was neither disproportionate nor unique. Rather, the African American reaction to the Vietnam War was enlarged by the newfound interest in African American views by the mainstream media. And it explains the reasons why the views of many African Americans on the war in the Johnson years would align more closely with the support of the NAACP and Urban League than with the opposition of SNCC, CORE, and even the SCLC.

Although this chapter will focus primarily on the presidential-civil rights relationship since 1940, it is important to note that its beginnings date back to the Progressive era with the founding of the NAACP and the National Urban League. One of the NAACP's first official acts in 1909 was to reprimand President William Howard Taft for announcing in his inaugural address that he would not name blacks to any federal positions over the objection of Southern whites. But with most African Americans impoverished, uneducated, and disenfranchised until the 1940s, supporters of the NAACP and the Urban League numbered only in the tens of thousands. Therefore the agenda of these organizations inhabited the margins of presidential politics and policies. Unlike CORE, SCLC, and SNCC, "Big Five" organizations born in the democratic, anti-colonial fervor of World War II and the Cold War years, the
oldest and largest civil rights organizations already had spent more than fifty years wandering through a desert of presidential neglect, disfavor, and disregard when Lyndon Johnson became president in November 1963. Until then only the rare and sporadic threat of social unrest or international approbation roused presidents to address civil rights issues or engage civil rights leaders, and then with uneven and often unsatisfactory results.

Nonetheless, the 1940s marked a watershed in both diplomatic and civil rights history. World War II reshaped the world order for the Cold War era and thrust the United States into the role of superpower with unmatched military might and economic and political reach. World War II also provided African Americans with their greatest opportunity for economic and social improvement since Reconstruction. Even in a segregated military and hostile defense industry the socio-economic gains would be substantial and lasting. In addition, established organizations like the NAACP, suddenly bursting with a new membership of assertive black veterans and factory workers, as well as new organizations like CORE, began testing the limits of segregation. The treatment of African Americans became an international bell weather of the values of American democracy in the rhetorical struggle between capitalism and communism. And the late 1940s anticommunist purge narrowed the focus of the civil rights movement to the agenda that triumphed in the 1960s.

Small but significant changes in the civil rights-presidential relationship developed as well. Socio-political phenomena like the migration of blacks northward
to urban centers, international crises like World War II and the Korean War, and technological innovations like television began to chip away at the combination of political and personal forces that enabled occupants of the Oval Office to ignore civil rights leaders and their agenda. Despite the fits and starts that would follow, the 1940s marked the beginning of the federal government's commitment to end segregation and to establish equality under the law. But these changes were slow to have an effect on the White House, where policy makers lived in a rarefied world limited almost entirely to privileged white males. So for almost the first two thirds of the twentieth century civil rights leaders and their concerns were essentially avoided.⁵

For most of the twentieth century the reasons the president did not support civil rights legislation or meet with civil rights leaders was remarkably consistent. Until Lyndon Johnson, the rare presidential-civil rights leader encounter was hardly a satisfying experience for either side. Presidents met with civil rights leaders *en masse* at primarily ceremonial occasions to minimize personal contact or substantive interaction. Leaders were counseled to be patient and discouraged altogether from pressing their concerns, which would invariably be sacrificed to appease southern legislators. Occasionally, after 1940, Democratic presidents would offer words of concern or symbolic gestures of support but real presidential collaboration or leadership remained elusive. Given this pattern it is easy to understand how a frustrated Du Bois could opine, "May God write us down as asses if ever again we are found putting our trust in either the Republican or the Democratic Parties."⁶
Civil rights progress, quite simply, was not a priority, at least not for the White House; at least not until November 24, 1963. What set Johnson apart was how far he was willing to go on behalf of civil rights, publicly and privately. Civil rights leaders rarely questioned Johnson’s commitment, unlike that of his predecessors. While John Kennedy was willing to “bear any burden and pay any price” to end communism, only Lyndon Johnson appeared willing to do so to end legal segregation. Only Lyndon Johnson made the commitment his predecessors shunned. As the consummate vote counter and power broker, Johnson knew that pushing civil rights meant ceding the South and the presidency to the Republican Party for years to come. His actions stood in bold relief to those of his predecessors, whose commitment to civil rights was, at best, ambiguous and, in some cases, non-existent.  

“Downright timid” was how Urban League historian Jesse Moore described Franklin Roosevelt when it came to subjects like racial equality, desegregation, discrimination, and lynching. Roosevelt’s personal “commitment to racial advancement,” according to Moore “was unclear throughout his terms in office.”  

Roy Wilkins, whose long apprenticeship as assistant executive secretary of the NAACP began shortly before Roosevelt became president, agreed, concluding that “Roosevelt was no friend of the Negro. He wasn’t an enemy, but he wasn’t a friend.”  

In fact, New Dealers contended that African Americans did not merit special concern from the administration, since “there wasn’t any race problem,” only the same economic
problem faced by all Americans during the Great Depression. As Barton Bernstein explained, "What the Negroes gained [under the New Deal]—relief, WPA jobs, equal pay on some federal projects—was granted them as poor people, not as Negroes."

This also included refusing to grant meetings to Negro civil rights leaders. Roosevelt met with civil rights leaders only twice in the 1930s and then only to appease the First Lady and stem the tide of criticism from other white liberals. Both times civil rights leaders walked away empty-handed since economic recovery, then war mobilization, trumped substantive racial reform for both the President and the First Lady. It was only when civil rights leaders threatened to disrupt the war effort that the Roosevelt administration finally offered anything close to a substantive meeting and a concession.

The creation of the Fair Employment Practices Committee, which finally acknowledged the problem of racial discrimination, was not a gift to the civil rights leaders from the Roosevelt White House. It came only as a result of the unity of civil rights leaders supporting A. Philip Randolph’s unwavering determination to organize a march on Washington to protest ongoing discrimination and segregation in the defense industries. Later, Roy Wilkins, who along with Walter White doubted Randolph’s ability to deliver the 10,000 marchers he promised, would wax poetic about the encounter, describing how “a tall courtly black man with Shakespearean diction and the stare of an eagle had looked the patrician Roosevelt in the eye—and made him back down.” The threat of potential social disorder with the nation on the brink of war
was a powerful motivator. As Paula Pfeffer, A. Philip Randolph's biographer, noted, President Roosevelt "had no intention of seeing thousands of blacks parade in protest on the malls of the nation's capital, particularly when German and Japanese propagandists were trying to exploit any evidence of U.S. racial differences." For the first time international events played to the advantage of civil rights leaders, and it was a lesson civil rights leaders would not soon forget. It was time for the White House to give civil rights leaders a new deal.

Roosevelt's successor, Harry Truman, was more popular with the civil rights leaders and accomplished an impressive number of symbolic "firsts." But Truman's "progress" was tempered by the obvious necessity of his actions for both political and international reasons. The international challenges of the Truman years rivaled anything that had come before. "No American before Truman," writes scholar Alonzo Hamby, "had assumed the presidency at a time of such rapid change and deep U.S. involvement in world affairs." And it would still require the threat of international and political crisis to get substantive action from the Truman White House. As the presidential election of 1948 neared and southern Democrats prepared to defect from the party, it became clear that Truman would need black leaders to deliver the black vote. Presidential political advisor Clark Clifford warned Truman that "Unless there are new and real efforts (as distinguished from mere political gestures which are today thoroughly understood and strongly resented by sophisticated Negro leaders), the Negro bloc which, certainly in Illinois and probably in New York and Ohio, does hold
the balance of power, will go Republican.” In addition A. Philip Randolph vowed to aid and abet an anti-draft movement if blacks were forced, once again, to serve in a “Jim Crow” military. Whatever the military’s objections, clearly continued segregation not only undermined the morale of black soldiers, but also Truman’s election hopes and America’s democratic pretensions. Politically, desegregation was the only option. Then and only then did Truman respond to civil rights demands to desegregate the military.

Nonetheless, the civil rights-presidential relationship under Harry Truman demonstrated that civil rights leaders did not require the president to accede to all their demands, share all their views on racial equality, or eliminate the need for civil rights leaders in order “to kick [the administration] all over the place” from time to time, as Bayard Rustin explained, to earn their respect. Although, according to Wilkins, Truman “didn’t believe in social equality,” he did “believe in fair play. [And] no one had ever convinced him that the Bill of Rights was a document for white folks only.” Wilkins also gave Truman high marks for recognizing that “You can’t cure a moral problem, or a social problem, by ignoring it.” And Walter White, who died in 1955, concluded, “No occupant of the White House since the nation was born has taken so frontal or constant a stand against racial discrimination as has Harry S. Truman.”

Truman was the first U.S. president to address the NAACP convention; the first to speak in Harlem; and the first to demand civil rights legislation publicly. As Barton Bernstein argued, he was also “the first President in the twentieth century to assail discrimination against Negroes, to condemn violence and intimidation directed at them,
to proclaim their legal equality.\textsuperscript{19} But despite this impressive string of supportive gestures, Truman had also kept civil rights leaders at arms-length in the first two years of his presidency for the same political and personal reasons as his predecessors.\textsuperscript{20} As with Franklin Roosevelt, Walter White had been forced to turn to Eleanor Roosevelt to get an audience with Truman. But once White stunned Truman with his vivid accounts of mob violence against black soldiers, he appointed a long-awaited national committee to look at the race problem. Their 1947 report, "To Secure These Rights," would serve as both a road map and a destination for the Democratic administrations that followed regarding civil rights. It endorsed federal anti-lynching legislation, abolition of the poll tax, federal protection for voter registration, integration of the military, home rule for the District of Columbia, a ban on "Jim Crow" in interstate transportation, and prohibition of discrimination in defense industries.\textsuperscript{21}

The military that Truman desegregated, according to Alonzo Hamby, played a critical role in shaping Dwight Eisenhower's racial attitudes. Eisenhower, the postwar president most openly hostile to both the cause of civil rights and to civil rights leaders had "spent almost his entire life as a career soldier," explained Hamby, "breathing in an atmosphere in which blacks were universally considered inferior, segregated, and kept in their very low place."\textsuperscript{22} This "low place," by definition, excluded the highest office in the land, the Oval Office. Repeated requests from civil rights leaders, beginning with Wilkins in the spring of 1953, then King and Randolph in early 1956 fell on deaf ears. By 1958 even maverick congressman Adam Clayton Powell, an Eisenhower supporter,
wrote that the President’s “evasiveness over meeting with the black leadership was beginning to make even him critical about the administration’s indifferent attitude toward civil rights.” Black White House Aide E. Frederick Morrow, cabinet secretary Max Rabb and even Vice President Nixon, who joined the chorus after meeting with King in the summer 1957, also made repeated requests for several years as concerns grew about possible political embarrassment from the rising clamor. Yet Eisenhower refused to meet with civil rights leaders until mid-way through his second term.\textsuperscript{23} A moralist who saw no moral imperative when it came to the issue of racial equality, Eisenhower disagreed not only with the strategies but also the objectives of the civil rights movement. Lacking any personal, political, international, economic, social, or ideological incentive to do so, Eisenhower, in the words of Walter White’s particularly apt description of Herbert Hoover, “sat stolidly in the White House, refusing bluntly to receive Negro citizens who wished to lay before him the facts of their worsening plight or to consider any remedial legislation or governmental action.”\textsuperscript{24}

In fact, when Eisenhower finally met with civil rights leaders for the first and only time in June 1958, it was to assure them that there would be no “remedial legislation or governmental action.” Rather than attempting to give, in the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., “persons of good will in general and Negro Americans in particular a feeling that the White House is listening to the problems which we confront,” Eisenhower refused to be “drawn into any definite commitments” regarding the slate of nine recommendations presented by the group.\textsuperscript{25} Nearly all of the
recommendations, which included Justice Department protection of the right to register
and vote and enactment of a new civil rights bill to strengthen the 1957 Act, became
either law, policy, or fact during the Johnson administration, but Eisenhower’s sole
direct response was to veto the notion of a White House conference on civil rights.26
Instead he told the delegation, consisting of King, Wilkins, Randolph and National
Urban League head Lester Granger, that he was “dismayed” that blacks “were greatly
displeased with his administration for not supporting the Supreme Court’s integration
decrees” and proposed that the best way to deal with the bitterness was simply for both
sides to do less. As Roosevelt historian William Leuchtenberg noted, “It was
altogether a misfortune for blacks in America that in the year the Supreme Court
handed down the Brown decision Dwight Eisenhower was president of the United
States.” For the general, Alonzo Hambly explained, was “intellectually and socially…
about as unprepared for the explosion of the civil rights movement as a president could
have been.”27

Like Franklin Roosevelt, Eisenhower publicly questioned whether civil rights
legislation was constitutional. And like Woodrow Wilson, he privately believed that
government activism such as the Brown decision “set back progress in the South.” In
Eisenhower’s view since “You cannot change the hearts of people by law,” only the
slow, gradual process of persuasion and education would improve the racial situation
for African Americans. But he would provide neither.28 For even progressive civil
rights measures during the Eisenhower administration actually had little to do with
furthering black interests. The administration's two civil rights bills, passed in 1957 and 1960, were little more than thinly-veiled attempts to split the Democratic Party along regional lines and reap political gains from black voters disgusted with the intransigence of the southern Democrats who would torment Eisenhower's successor. 29 That the strategy failed was largely due to the successful efforts of the Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson to pass the measures.

Although John Kennedy would finally propose the comprehensive civil rights legislation civil rights leaders had sought, for most of his presidency he demonstrated the same lethargy as his predecessors when it came to civil rights. In a gesture reminiscent of William Howard Taft, Kennedy distanced himself from his pre-election pro-civil rights rhetoric by announcing, almost immediately upon taking office, that he would not seek civil rights legislation. It was a clear signal that, despite his campaign promises, the prevailing White House-civil rights paradigm would remain. As late as the winter of 1963, Kennedy continued to resist introducing a civil rights initiative, telling black reporters that "the country faced no serious division on racial matters, and that the problems of Negroes would be addressed as part of the Administration's overall approach to education and economic growth." It was this kind of New Deal rhetoric that convinced A. Philip Randolph that it was time to revive the March on Washington formula that had resulted in the FEPC. 30

When describing Kennedy's attitude toward civil rights, presidential historian Richard Sherman's description of his 1920s predecessor Warren G. Harding seems
particularly appropriate. Like Harding, Kennedy’s “public statements, while often pretty general, were usually friendly, and on the occasions when he met with Negro delegations his manner was warm and cordial. But his understanding of racial problems was superficial, and in dealing with them he lacked a sense of moral urgency or strong political necessity.”

Kennedy’s civil rights aide Harris Wofford confirmed the assessment, noting that at their first meeting Kennedy expected him “in five minutes [to] tick off the ten things a President ought to do to cleanup this goddamn civil rights mess.” After meeting Kennedy the first time, Martin Luther King, Jr. told Wofford that he was convinced Kennedy had “the understanding and the political skill” lacked the necessary “moral passion” when it came to civil rights. Historian David Southern agreed that “Kennedy exhibited precious little courage, passion, or deep knowledge about the race issue…. To him it was a political problem to be managed”—but not by him. For as Chester Bowles noted, “Management in Jack Kennedy’s mind… consisted largely of calling Bob [Kennedy] on the telephone and saying, ‘Here are ten things I want to get done.’”

Despite presidential speechwriter Theodore Sorensen’s claim that President Kennedy was constantly in touch with Negro leaders,” historian Taylor Branch concluded that President Kennedy was “largely absent from the racial deliberations of his presidency.”

In reality President Kennedy delegated most of the administration’s civil rights work to the Attorney General. For example, during the Albany civil rights campaign crisis, the president assured reporters that “he was in constant touch with the
Attorney General who was following the situation closely.” This would be the pattern for most of the Kennedy administration: the Attorney General followed “the situation closely” while the president received updates and summaries. The intractability of the problem and the emotionalism on both sides of the segregation question made the president uncomfortable so the issue was deemed “too prosaic, too small, and quirkishly human for [his] attention.”

The one instance when President Kennedy willingly gave his attention to civil rights leaders on a substantive matter occurred when they came to discuss U.S. foreign policy. On December 17, 1962 Randolph, Wilkins, James Farmer of CORE, Dorothy Height of the National Council of Negro Women, Young, and King presented the President with the American Negro Leadership Conference on Africa (ANLCA) resolutions regarding American-African relations. The meeting ended up lasting three hours. Hailed by the black press as “the longest conference ever held by Negroes with a U.S. President in the White House,” it also was to be the only time President Kennedy felt that civil rights leaders warranted so much of his time. All other concerns were to be handled elsewhere. Jet magazine’s political columnist Simeon Booker called the meeting a “stroke of misfortune” that “undercut the influence of Negro leadership.” The fact that they had spent their longest meeting with the President discussing the freedom of Africans rather than their own “dimmed the possibilities of a future Big Six sessions with the President.” They left the meeting bitter and sad.
If Dwight Eisenhower was the postwar descendent of Woodrow Wilson on civil rights, John F. Kennedy was the Franklin Roosevelt of the 1960's. Kennedy's campaign literature overtly made the connection between the two with the caption, "A Leader like Roosevelt." And Wofford wrote that the more he saw of Kennedy, "the truer [the comparison] seemed," considering both men's "underdeveloped" conscience on the subject of civil rights. But it was not just how they thought about civil rights that linked the two men. They employed similar means to avoid addressing the topic. Both men relied on the masterful use of the media and the judicious use of a surrogate with a unique personal relationship to the president, to create the illusion of interest and access without actually granting it. The son of a one-time movie mogul, Kennedy understood the power of images from the absence of black officers in the inaugural parade honor guard to photos of his children at play. Assisted by black newspaperman Louis Martin, Kennedy cultivated the friendship of the black press during his campaign and presidency, knowing that good press coverage magnified symbolic actions and gave them life. In doing so, Kennedy, like Roosevelt, reached over the heads of civil rights leaders to appeal directly for the support of African American voters while acceding to almost none of the demands of civil rights leaders.

As with Roosevelt, civil rights leaders learned to work with a presidential surrogate, albeit one much more useful than the president's wife. Although Martin Luther King, Jr. had warned the Eisenhower White House that meetings with the Vice President could "in no way substitute for the necessity of my talking directly with the
head of our great government,” King expressed no such concerns when dealing with Robert Kennedy. In fact, King claimed that, “Whenever I had talks with the Attorney General, I always felt I was talking with the President. So I always interpreted our conversations... as he was really articulating the convictions of the President. This was true in all our dealings.” Apparently, when the surrogate was the president’s brother, who also happened to be the Attorney General of the United States, the President could avoid dealing directly with civil rights leaders for quite a while—but not forever. According to Jet magazine’s Washington correspondent Simeon Booker, “The more [civil rights leaders] thought about it the more they began to feel the Kennedys had bamboozled them.... ‘Really,’ a leader told me, ‘we’ve gotten the best snow job history. We’ve lost two years because we admired him for what should have been done years ago.”

Realizing that Kennedy’s charm was no substitute for legislation, civil rights leaders began looking for new ways to force the administration’s hand in the winter of 1963. Faced with increasing opposition and having reneged on its own commitment to progress via executive orders, the White House attempted to appease civil rights leaders by capitalizing on the fact that the President and First Lady “felt completely relaxed at social gatherings of Negroes.” The strategy, courtesy of DNC Deputy Chair Louis Martin, led to large social events like the 1963 Lincoln’s birthday White House reception for blacks that Martin hoped would head off much of the possible white criticism from both political parties by casting the event in honor of the hallowed Republican president. [Martin] was confident
that such a reception would redound to President
Kennedy's credit among Negroes—to whom the White
House had been socially off limits except in token
numbers. The presence of Negro celebrities in the White
House would attract banner coverage in the Negro press.

Recognizing it as window dressing, several leaders like King, Clarence Mitchell, and A.
Philip Randolph boycotted the event and began planning the March on Washington. 44
Once again the threat of social chaos and international approbation was deemed
necessary to move the president to act.

Failure to act was the least of Lyndon Johnson's problems in his first two years
in the Oval Office. His prodigious energy on behalf of civil rights legislation signaled a
radical departure from his predecessors. Only Lyndon Johnson was willing to hold up
passage of other reform legislation for the sake of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Only
Johnson was willing to threaten southern legislators into compliance instead of
threatening civil rights leaders into silence. Johnson gave his unequivocal,
unprecedented support to civil rights, both in public and in private, with Congress and
with the nation. He not only acknowledged the race problem, he embraced it as an
American problem, one that he was determined to see the nation overcome.

But it just Johnson's public policies regarding civil rights legislation that set him
apart from his predecessors. It was also his private policies regarding civil rights
leaders. Only Lyndon Johnson spoke with leaders directly and individually almost
immediately upon taking office. While Eisenhower had waited more than five years
after taking office to receive civil rights leaders, Johnson waited only five days. He
treated them as individuals rather an as a faceless group. Even after his relationship with King became strained, King’s calls got through to the President. Johnson’s words and his sacrifice on their behalf was not soon forgotten by African Americans old enough to remember what had gone before in either domestic or foreign policy.

A look at African American attitudes toward previous military conflict provides needed historical perspective when examining claims that African Americans were “disproportionately” opposed to the war in Vietnam. For if the histories of dissent that have charted African American opinion on U.S. foreign policy are correct, African Americans have been “disproportionately” opposed to every U.S. military conflict in the twentieth century. Alfred Hero found in a 1969 analysis of survey data regarding African American views on U.S foreign policy between 1937 and 1967 that African Americans were consistently more isolationist than whites. African American opposition to the Vietnam War was less an aberration than part of a larger pattern. In fact, according to diplomatic historian Brenda Gayle Plummer, it is extremely rare that the government’s foreign policy interests and black interests coincide.

What was different about black opinion on Vietnam was not the opposition, but the attention it received from a mainstream press that had only recently discovered through their coverage of the civil rights movement that blacks were not the illiterate, inarticulate individuals they had imagined. So by the mid-1960s African American views that had once been strictly the domain of black newspapers now appeared
broadly in the mainstream press, reported by white writers who possessed neither the context nor the perspective to portray them properly.

By comparing the African American response to World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War, several similarities and patterns regarding African American opinion emerge. In all three cases, African American opinion was determined primarily by domestic rather than foreign policy concerns. For example, when the president was perceived to be pro-civil rights, the African American community supported the war effort and continued to do so despite concerns regarding the effects of the war on domestic programs. In each case, African Americans hoped that their support during the war would provide a basis for civil rights progress at home when it ended.

African Americans were belated supporters of World War II. According to Plummer "Afro-American cooperation in the World War II effort" had been "difficult to obtain" because all the Allies, as colonial occupiers of Africa and Asia, were vulnerable on the question of race.46 Many black Americans remained unenthusiastic about the war, even after Pearl Harbor, as segregation in the military and resentment of domestic injustice fueled black antiwar sentiment. Only by re-casting the war as their "dress rehearsal for sweeping change" through a "double victory" at home and abroad, did African Americans support the war effort. In exchange for this support black Americans intended to present the federal government with a large bill for services rendered: the end of racial segregation and injustice.47 As already noted, the approach
of the war had resulted in the creation of the FEPC and its arrival brought unprecedented economic opportunities.

In his examination of black opposition to United States’ wars since the turn of the century, Gerald Gill found that initially the attitudes of most black Americans toward the Korean War were not markedly different from those of whites. At first both groups focused on the potential for increased economic opportunities brought on by war. Gill noted that many blacks continued to support the administration even after receiving news of the mistreatment, courts martial, and harsh punishments meted out to black soldiers and later the nation’s apparent inability to conclude the war successfully. He found that “while civil rights leaders and the black press repeatedly criticized the Truman administration and Congress for their respective failure to introduce and to enact civil rights legislation, only the Pittsburgh Courier consistently criticized the administration’s foreign…policies.” Gill also noted that while sizable pluralities of blacks agreed that the U.S. “made a mistake in going into the war in Korea,” many also approved of the General MacArthur’s call for a complete military victory in East Asia. In fact, the Norfolk Journal and Guide editorialized that given a choice between the architects of limited war or the architect of an all-out military victory they would “pick MacArthur any day.” As with Vietnam, those who acknowledged that entering the war was a mistake did not necessarily support immediate withdrawal from it, leaving one to conclude that positive responses to the “mistake” question were more often indications of general isolationist tendencies rather than specific antiwar sentiments.
Opposition to the draft also was not peculiar to the Vietnam War. Prior to the Korean conflict A. Philip Randolph threatened to encourage black men to resist a draft that forced them to serve in a segregated military. Like the opposition to the Vietnam draft, the concern was primarily a domestic one. Vietnam era draft resistance in the African American community was based on the perceived unfairness of the process carried out by lily-white draft boards that readily granted deferments to white college students while refusing them to blacks who applied for religious or medical reasons.

This perspective does not appear in the contemporary surveys and accounts citing the "disproportionate" opposition of African Americans to the Vietnam War. So while the percentage of blacks opposed to the war in Vietnam was higher than that of whites, it had always been so. Opposition to the war in Vietnam was not an aberration but was in fact part of a larger pattern of isolationist sentiment in the black community.

In addition, by the time of the Vietnam War black leaders were not unaware that beginning with World War II the challenges surrounding the war effort (mobilization, etc.) increased their ability to demand and receive civil rights concessions at home. From this point forward civil right leaders would attempt to use international crises to win concessions from the White House. In the spring of 1948, Randolph not only warned the Truman administration that blacks would refuse to "bear arms again until all forms of bias and discrimination are abolished," he vowed to aid and abet an anti-draft movement if blacks were forced to serve in a segregated units.
And the landmark report “To Secure These Rights” was issued less than a week after the Soviet Union introduced the NAACP’s petition to the United Nations detailing the history of racial discrimination and its social, political and economic impact on black Americans in 1947. Civil rights leaders had learned a valuable lesson in the 1940s about the new leverage impending international crisis brought to the struggle for civil rights when the world’s spotlight focused on U.S. racial policies.

Conversely, with no large-scale military mobilization looming during the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations civil rights leaders made little progress in persuading the administration to act affirmatively on behalf of civil rights. Without a foreign policy impetus, civil rights leaders were forced to create situations of social chaos to elicit a response from the federal government that might or might not come in time to prevent bloodshed. This was a dangerous and risky strategy with no guarantees of success, especially in the 1950s. Eisenhower successfully held the line against any forward motion on civil rights until well into his second term, despite the ruling of the Supreme Court. JFK was able to stall until the last few months of his abbreviated administration. But civil rights leaders, particularly Whitney Young, hoped that the escalation of the Vietnam War would represent another opportunity to force the government’s hand.

Also the integrated military that would fight in Vietnam appeared to black World War II veterans to present an even better opportunity for educational and occupational advancement than the segregated military had during World War II.
These were the same World War II veterans like Medgar Evers who expanded the
ranks of the NAACP tenfold in the 1940s. And one of them, Whitney Young, was now
Executive Director of the Urban League. Historians John Modell, Marc Goulden, and
Sigurdur Magnusson found that World War II had been a turning point for black
servicemen, increasing their optimism, aspirations, and, perhaps most importantly,
"their unwillingness to accept the prewar structure of racial dominance that
characterized the nation." In practical terms military service during World War II had
contributed as much as two or three years of formal education to increase their postwar
income.\textsuperscript{54} African American veterans hoped that the Vietnam War had the potential to
do the same for a new generation of African American males.

These factors, the African American experience both at home and abroad
during World War II and the Korean War as well as the civil rights-presidential
relationship, particularly since 1940, greatly affected the way African Americans would
respond to the Vietnam War. In some ways their response would be predictable, in
keeping with their isolationist tendencies and their focus on domestic policy. But in
other ways, given the unprecedented support for civil rights demonstrated by Lyndon
Johnson and their newfound postwar visibility and prosperity, the African American
response would be unprecedented as well.

The next chapter examines the postwar histories of the NAACP and the
National Urban League and their leadership relative to U.S. foreign and domestic
policies and the burgeoning civil rights movement’s interactions with first Senator and then Vice President Lyndon Johnson.
ENDNOTES


3 Charles Evers, Oral History, LBJL, 22.

4 CORE, SCLC, and SNCC were started in 1943, 1957, and 1960, respectively.


6 W.E.B. Du Bois, Crisis (May 1922), 11.

7 When one of Johnson’s political mentors Georgia Senator Richard Russell warned that pushing the civil rights bill would cost him the South and the 1964 election, Johnson responded “If that’s the price I’ve got to pay, I’ll pay it gladly.” Dallek, Flawed Giant, 112.


9 Sitkoff, A New Deal, 318-20; Franklin, From Slavery, 436-7; Clark, “The Civil Rights Movement,” 240; Wilkins, Standing Fast, 180-1; Farmer, Lay Bare the Heart, 155; Wynn, The Afro-American, 39; Harris, The Harder We Run, 122; Rosenberg, “How Far,” 12, 421; Wilkins quoted in Weiss, Farewell, 222. Wilkins considered Roosevelt "overrated as a champion of the Negro" Wilkins, Standing Fast, 127.


13 Sitkoff, A New Deal, 318-20; Franklin, From Slavery, 436-7; Clark, “The Civil Rights Movement,” 240; Wilkins, Standing Fast, 180-1; Farmer, Lay Bare the Heart, 155; Wynn, The Afro-American, 39; Harris, The Harder We Run, 122; Rosenberg, “How Far,” 12, 421; Wilkins quoted in Weiss, Farewell, 222. Wilkins considered Roosevelt "overrated as a champion of the Negro" Wilkins, Standing Fast, 127.

14 Bernstein, “Ambiguous Legacy,” 279; Watson, Lion, 163; Hamby, Liberalism, 71.

15 Bernstein, “Ambiguous Legacy,” 273; Berman, The Politics of Civil Rights, 45, 105; Clark Clifford quoted in Kellogg, Civil Rights, 26-7. Berman makes clear that Truman’s civil rights program was
motivated primarily by political and Cold War, not humanitarian, considerations.


17 Bayard Rustin, Oral History, LBJL, Tape 2, 16.

18 Wilkins, Standing Fast, 193, 198; Bernstein, “Ambiguous Legacy,” 302.


20 Wynn, The Afro-American and the Second World War, 120.


22 Hamby, Liberalism, 126. Also see Branch, Parting the Waters, 213.

23 Wilkins, Standing Fast, 255; Burk, Eisenhower, 84; Garrow, “Black Civil Rights,” 272-3, 279; Branch, Parting the Waters, 213, 216.


25 Garrow, “Black Civil Rights,” 278-7, 281; King repeated this point at the pre-meeting planning session with White House aides, telling them that after five a half years “the Negro community is beginning to feel that the President would not or could not see Negro leaders.” Garrow, Bearing the Cross, 106; Branch, Parting the Waters, 234. David Garrow contends that the 1957 Prayer Pilgrimage to Washington “was a direct outgrowth of the black leadership’s dismay that the Eisenhower administration had little interest in the growing turmoil in the South or the thoughts of black leadership.” Garrow, “Black Civil Rights,” 274, 280. Richard Dalfiume makes a similar claim that much of the early support for the 1941 March on Washington Movement among the civil right leadership stemmed from their inability to “even secure an appointment” to see Franklin Roosevelt. See Dalfiume, “The ‘Forgotten Years,’” 98.

26 They also requested an unequivocal nationwide declaration of the White House’s support for enforcement of the Brown decision; a White House conference between black and white Southern leaders to discuss peaceful compliance with Court rulings; provision of resources and assistance from government agencies to officials and community groups involved in carrying out the decision; Justice Department involvement in the Little Rock case; Justice Department action against recent acts of violence; extension of the authorization of the Civil Rights Commission; the withdrawal of federal funds supporting segregation in education, housing, and local government. Reddick, MLK, 84-86; Wilkins, Standing Fast, 256.
27. Leuchtenberg, “The White House,” 122-3. This sentiment is echoed by many civil rights historians who blame Eisenhower for looking the other way as the South mounted its violent, illegal, and disruptive campaign of massive resistance against school desegregation and black voting rights. Garrow, “Black Civil Rights,” 271; Southern, Gunnar Myrdal, 240-1; Lawson, Running for Freedom, 51; Burk, Eisenhower, 263; Hamby, Liberalism, 126.


29. Sitkoff, The Struggle for Black Equality, 33; Sundquist, Politics and Policy, 243, 247; Southern, Gunnar Myrdal, 241. The administration’s amicus brief in the Brown case was the result of the Supreme Court compelling the U.S. Attorney General to join in the re-argument. White, How Far, 52.

30. Booker, Black Man’s America, 50-1; Mark Stern, Calculating Visions: Kennedy, Johnson, and Civil Rights (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 78-9; Branch, Parting the Waters, 699.


33. Sorenson, Kennedy, 476. In a footnote even Sorenson admitted that “many efforts [were] initiated by the Department of Justice in particular; and because of the President-Attorney General relationship, more of these efforts proceeded outside the purview of [his] office than was true of most domestic matters.” Branch. Parting the Waters, 918-9.

34. Both David Garrow’s Bearing the Cross and Taylor Branch’s Parting the Waters recount numerous meetings between civil rights leaders and the Attorney General with President Kennedy making cameo appearances claiming that he was keeping up with movement developments “through the Attorney General.” See Garrow, Bearing the Cross, 154; Branch, Parting the Waters, 405-7, 428, 693.

35. Schlesinger, Robert F. Kennedy, 308-367; Southern, Gunnar Myrdal, 249-50; Brauer, John F. Kennedy, 172.

36. Chester Bowles quoted in Schlesinger, RFK, 645-6; Branch, Parting the Waters, 58/. 398-399; Sorenson, Kennedy, 471; Stern, Calculating Visions, 43; Lemann, The Promised Land, 115.

37. Garrow, Bearing the Cross, 225; Branch, Parting the Waters, 675, 684. Booker, Black Man’s America, 29-32.

39 Michael and Edwin Emery contend that "No president had more effective relationships with the press" than FDR. Michael Emery and Edwin Emery, The Press and America: An Interpretive History (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1996), 306-7. Hamby, Liberalism, x, 6-7, 21, 32-3; Bernstein, "Ambiguous Legacy," 279. The Kennedy administration provided the press "with a steady stream of encouraging news, which also enhanced the image of the administration." Keppel, The Work, 6; From the critical pre-election debates to the witty live press conferences, from the water hoses and biting dogs in Birmingham to the four-day long state funeral, the Kennedy presidency was defined by how it played on television. See Hamby, Liberalism, 183. 199-201; Patterson, Grand Expectations, 438; Emery and Emery, The Press and America, 397-405; Brauer, John F. Kennedy, 70.

40 Garrow, "Black Civil Rights," 278-7, 281; King repeated this point at the pre-meeting planning session with White House aides, telling them that after five a half years "the Negro community is beginning to feel that the President would not or could not see Negro leaders." Garrow, Bearing the Cross, 106; Branch, Parting the Waters, 234.

41 King quoted in Stern, Calculating Visions, 55.

42 Booker, Black Man's America, 29-32.

43 DNC Deputy Chair Louis Martin argued "the key was to think of something that made President Kennedy feel that he was taking advantage of his personal strengths. In Martin's view, these were social more than political.... Here the contrast between Kennedy and his predecessor, Eisenhower, was stark. In no other aspect relating to race did he compare more favorably...." Branch, Parting the Waters, 686-7. For other instances of President Kennedy "de-fanging" movement officials, often through social interaction, see Booker, Black Man's America, 24-5.

44 Booker, Black Man's America, 50-1; Mark Stern, Calculating Visions: Kennedy, Johnson, and Civil Rights (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 78-9; Branch, Parting the Waters, 699.


46 Plummer, Rising Wind, 66.


52 Wynn, The Afro-American, 20, 101; Sitkoff, A New Deal, 317; White, How Far, 119; Weisbrot, 13.


CHAPTER 2


Wilkins “was confident in the belief that whatever was being done had been done before by someone, somewhere, at some time in his association’s rich past.”

James Farmer¹

“The FBI also established liaison with National Urban League executive director Whitney Young, who tried to turn the liaison program around to meet Urban League needs and not Bureau needs.”

Kenneth O’Reilly²

Johnson “dreamed of becoming President himself, and knew that so long as he had Jim Crow wrapped around him, the rest of the country would see him only as a Southerner, a corn-pone Southerner at that, rather than a man of national stature. So around 1957 he began to change his course on civil rights.”

Roy Wilkins³

"...there’s something in the folklore of Negro life that [says] a reconstructed southerner is really far more liberal than a liberal Yankee.”

Louis Martin⁴

On November 24, 1963, just two days after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, President Lyndon Johnson called Whitney Young, Jr., executive director of the National Urban League, to discuss efforts to win passage of pending civil rights legislation. The former vice president had gotten to know Young during his two and a half-year tenure as chair of the President’s Committee on Equal Opportunity during the Kennedy administration. After briefly discussing themes for Johnson’s upcoming message to a Joint Session of Congress, Young mentioned that he had yet to receive an

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invitation to President Kennedy’s funeral. Within minutes Johnson was calling back to
tell Young that his invitation and that of NAACP Executive Secretary Roy Wilkins,
next on Johnson’s list of calls, would be messengered out that evening and that he
would make arrangements to see that Young arrived for the funeral on time. This
story is indicative of the way Lyndon Johnson radically altered the traditional
relationship between civil rights leaders and the Oval Office in the first two years of his
presidency.

This chapter seeks to answer a basic question underlying the unprecedented
relationship that led moderate civil rights leaders like Whitney Young, Roy Wilkins,
and A. Philip Randolph and his chief lieutenant, Bayard Rustin, to support President
Johnson’s policies in Southeast Asia despite the anti-war sentiments of their direct
action counterparts in CORE, SNCC, and the SCLC. How and why would a southern
president and the leaders of the two largest civil rights organizations form such an
alliance when so many of their predecessors and contemporaries had not? For the
Wilkins-Johnson-Young relationship is so much more than the now familiar story of
civil rights leaders abandoning their critique of U.S. foreign policy to gain concessions
on domestic issues. It was a meeting of personality, minds, and interests that coincided
with the aspirations of middle- and working-class African Americans in the mid- to
late- 1960s. The decision was based on a complex mixture of personal history,
organizational history, and a strategic reading of the rapidly changing civil rights
movement in post-World War II America.
By the time Lyndon Johnson became president in late 1963, traditional civil rights organizations that attempted to work within the judicial, legislative, and governmental process-- like the Urban League and NAACP-- had survived a variety of Cold War era challenges. After fighting off attacks by communist-front civil rights organizations in the 1940s, these organizations had spent the 1950s and early 1960s beating back severe challenges from southern segregationists who deemed their methods subversive and from direct action advocates who deemed their methods outdated and ineffectual. Not only were there more civil rights organizations vying for members, by 1963 the federal government was also attempting to manage the course of the movement for its own purposes. Indeed, as clashes between segregationist and direct action partisans threatened the domestic social order and tarnished the American image abroad the ability to provide leadership on the issue of civil rights became a litmus test for political leaders.⁷

By the time he became president, Lyndon Johnson had been developing the necessary skills, relationships, and resources to provide such leadership. As a U.S. Senator from Texas since 1948 and a southern politician with the highest political ambitions, Lyndon Johnson recognized that leadership on the issue of civil rights could provide him with the visibility and credibility he needed to become a national figure. Johnson believed that the ideology and culture of segregation limited the ambitions of southern legislators by putting them at odds with the rest of the country, and on the wrong side of history. So in 1957, as Senate Majority Leader, he had used his mastery
of the legislative process to engineer passage of the first civil rights legislation since Reconstruction. In doing so, he attracted the attention of the NAACP leadership, particularly Roy Wilkins with whom he shared many personal qualities and political perspectives.8

Already united by their New Deal-based belief in the power of government to solve the nation’s problems, Wilkins and Johnson shared the bitter irony of beginning the 1960s being bested by younger rivals whose political success, they believed, represented the triumph of style over substance.9 Having given up his powerful position as Senate Majority Leader to become vice-president in an administration where everything about him marked him as the ultimate outsider, Johnson found solace in his work as chair of the President’s Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity. With mastery and leadership over little else, Johnson found badly needed friends in civil rights leaders who were “surprised and delighted” by the Vice President’s accessibility and attentiveness.10 Black leaders like James Farmer of CORE and Whitney Young of the Urban League used these years to develop Johnson’s understanding of civil rights issues much as NAACP and Urban League leaders had done with Eleanor Roosevelt in the 1930s, the same decade in which Roy Wilkins began his service with the NAACP.11

Executive Secretary Walter White recruited Wilkins to be assistant executive secretary in 1931, just as the organization was entering a watershed period. By the end of the 1930s the NAACP, with Wilkins’ help, had locked into a methodological and
ideological course that resulted in a historic commitment to legal and constitutional
equality for African Americans, the dismissal of founding member and intellectual giant
W.E.B. Du Bois, and the establishment of a highly bureaucratic organizational
structure. These changes would end the divisive power struggle between White and
Du Bois, consolidating White’s hold on the organization, and precipitating its rise to
the top of the civil rights hierarchy. At the same time, however, it would severely limit
the NAACP’s ability to meet a changing civil rights agenda in the second half of the
1960s.\textsuperscript{12}

After its first two decades of failed petitions, investigations, letter writing, and
lobbying, the NAACP committed itself in the 1930s to a judicial offensive against Jim
Crow as a violation of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. Although Walter
White recognized an exclusive focus on desegregation “failed to attack problems of
employment and the like which affect the lives” of the poor, he was unsuccessful in his
efforts to persuade the rest of the organization “to confront the economics issues facing
the black community.” Wilkins, on the other hand, believed that taking on the class
issue would be “suicidal” for the NAACP because it would align the organization with
the same communist groups it had already battled for leadership of the civil rights
movement earlier in the decade.\textsuperscript{13} Instead Wilkins preferred to leave the pursuit of
economic parity to the Urban League in accordance with their longstanding division of
labor.\textsuperscript{14} According to most historians, Wilkins won the day, narrowing the
organization's agenda to one that emphasized individual liberties over class gains and protected the Association from any hint of communist taint.\textsuperscript{15}

That narrowing lay at the heart of White's (and Wilkins') bitter battle with Du Bois.\textsuperscript{16} As Taylor Branch writes,

A gifted publicist and lobbyist who called several Supreme Court Justices and more than a score of U.S. senators by their first names, White was as vain as Du Bois and made no secret of his belief that the grand old man was too eccentric to play a constructive role in the NAACP's new drive for legislation against lynching and Jim Crow. [Meanwhile] Du Bois... refused to promote the NAACP's programs in [the Crisis.] He considered the programs mundane, and he made matters worse by commenting that White had no brains.\textsuperscript{17}

Wilkins' assignment to control Du Bois during White's frequent absences from the national office ended abruptly when Du Bois publicly turned his back on an interracial solution to the "Negro problem." When Du Bois was forced to resign as editor of the Crisis and dismissed from the organization, Wilkins' background in journalism made him a suitable successor, professionally if not intellectually. With his rival banished and his hand-picked assistant in control of the organization's official organ, White's hold on both the philosophical and administrative reins of the organization was now complete. United behind a single leader, the NAACP emerged from the 1930s as "the strongest of all the race advancement organizations," a lesson not lost on Wilkins, and it grew even stronger in the 1940s.\textsuperscript{18}

World War II changed not only the face of the world, but also the face of the NAACP. Membership expanded so dramatically in the 1940s that the former interracial
coterie of northern, highly educated, upper-class, political elites became a mass organization dominated by middle-class southern blacks and northern migrants who sought to protect the professional success, financial independence, and personal autonomy they had tasted during the war. But increased local activism met with violent reprisals as race riots broke out on military bases (a large percentage of the new members were black servicemen) and in forty-seven American cities, including Detroit, New York, and Los Angeles in 1942-43. In response, Wilkins counseled local branches to get their members off the streets and into the voting booths in support of NAACP initiatives to pass anti-lynching and anti-poll tax legislation. Important judicial victories against disenfranchisement (Smith v. Allwright, 1944) and housing discrimination (Shelley v. Kraemer, 1948) re-enforced Wilkins' belief that more could be accomplished in the courtrooms than in the streets, where the human cost of direct confrontation was too high.\textsuperscript{19}

In the 1940s Wilkins also learned a valuable lesson regarding the costs and benefits of close associations with white liberals. In the new postwar environment Walter White's brand of "personal diplomacy" began to yield results for civil rights but also personal benefits for White. His "predilection for a 'first name' approach to power figures" enabled White to determine who would be invited to race relations conferences with top government officials or to a White House meeting with the President or to testify before Congress, increasing his personal prestige and that of the NAACP as well as its resources and access. When Du Bois, whom White had invited back for the
NAACP's campaign against post-war colonialism at the United Nations, pushed through a broad resolution prohibiting paid staff members from participating in partisan activities in an effort to short-circuit the Truman-White alliance, White rallied the support of white liberal board members to force Du Bois out for the final time.21 Two years later, in 1949, after his scandalous marriage to a thrice-divorced, white South African, White rallied these same forces to block his own ouster, preventing Wilkins who had "actively campaigned to replace White," from ascending to the top spot for another half decade. Largely because of his relationships with powerful liberals like Eleanor Roosevelt and President Truman, White remained the official voice of the organization and a force to be reckoned with until his death in 1955, even though Wilkins was given more power to run the day-to-day operations of the organization and gave up editorship of the Crisis in order to take on his increased responsibilities.22

But White's personal diplomacy approach with powerful liberals like the president and former First Lady produced access and pride but also "suspicion and envy." And according to most scholars, his alliance with Truman muted the NAACP's criticism of U.S. foreign policy.23 Clearly the NAACP became much more conservative in its critique of U.S. foreign policy during this period. But whether this shift was a concession to the progressive civil rights agenda of the Truman administration, a strategic response to the ravages of McCarthyism, or the result of the gradual shift in leadership from the more internationally savvy White to the more narrowly educated Wilkins remains open to debate.24 Most historians agree, however, that the NAACP
gave up any pretense of nonpartisanship during the Truman years though both Kellogg and Tillman contend that prior to the election White "apparently kept up enough contacts with prominent Republicans to provide a subtle but unmistakable threat of black political independence."\textsuperscript{25}

Historians August Meier, John Bracey, and Adam Fairclough conclude that the early Cold War years leading up to the \textit{Brown} decision and the censure of Joseph McCarthy had a "contradictory impact" on the NAACP. Despite constant attacks from white southerners and right-wing conservatives who characterized all civil rights organizations as communist fronts, the NAACP also "entered its most prosperous period," as it leveraged the Soviet critique of democratic capitalism to obtain long-sought after racial reforms.\textsuperscript{26} But in addition to realizing unprecedented civil rights gains in the early postwar period, the NAACP also suffered severe losses. After peaking at over 450,000 members during the war, the organization lost more than half its members between 1948 and 1950, due to a hike in membership fees, the White scandal, and preventive anticommunist purges. Adam Fairclough concluded that "By collaborating with the anticommunist crusade the NAACP saw off rivals like the Civil Rights Congress and found itself in sole possession of the field." But its success also left the organization "with nothing to buffer it on the left... [so the NAACP] bore the full brunt of 'Massive Resistance' to [the \textit{Brown vs. Board of Education} Supreme court decision], taking ten years to recover."\textsuperscript{27}
As acting executive secretary in 1949-50 Wilkins made sure that the NAACP followed the lead of organized labor in taking a strong stand against communism even if it meant purging local branches of their most dedicated and talented workers. Under Wilkins’ watchful eye, delegates to the 1950 annual convention adopted two anti-communist resolutions creating a committee to investigate communism within the local branches and empowering the Board of Directors to “suspend and reorganize or lift the charter and expel any branch, which . . . comes under Communist or other political control and domination.”28 With McCarthy on the attack, Du Bois banished, and White diminished by scandal and declining health, the ambitious, risk-averse, and internationally unsophisticated Wilkins avoided any stance that could possibly associate the NAACP with rabidly anti-colonial communist forces or endanger his eventual ascension.29

The ups and downs the NAACP experienced in the first decade after the war was merely preparation for the 1950s when the organization achieved its most significant judicial and legislative victories and also its most severe challenges, not only from white supremacists and a president who opposed the movement, but also from black activists who supported it.30 The history of the NAACP in the 1950s can be divided into two distinctive phases, separated by the death of Walter White and the complete transfer of power to Wilkins in 1955. Before 1955 the NAACP successfully fought off communist infiltration and achieved its greatest legal legacy in the Brown decision. But the last half of the decade saw the acceleration of “massive resistance” in
the South in the wake of the “Brown II” decision and tacit support for the Southern offensive from the Eisenhower administration. It saw the complete separation of the Legal Defense Fund from the main organization. And finally, it brought the start of the Montgomery bus boycott which introduced Martin Luther King, Jr. and the strategy of non-violent resistance onto the national scene, challenging Wilkins’ and the NAACP’s legalistic approach and presumptive supremacy over the civil rights movement.

While Wilkins was no less autocratic than his predecessor, he was a very different man, possessed of much smaller vision and talents. Walter White had been a popular, “big picture” person who constantly prodded African Americans to “push back our horizons and understand that this problem of race relations on which we work is intertwined into every other question facing the world today.” Wilkins, on the other hand, was experientially and temperamentally ill-suited to operate on the national or international stage and lacked White’s intellectual and social facility. Like Lyndon Johnson, Wilkins was better-suited to operating behind the scenes. “His style, manner, background, and personality,” wrote psychologist and civil rights historian Kenneth Clark in 1966, “are not consistent with a mass appeal. He seems more comfortable in rational discussions with key decision-makers in economic and governmental centers of power than before a mass meeting of his ‘followers.’”

Born in St. Louis, Missouri in 1901, Roy Wilkins was seven years older than Johnson and the second oldest member of the “Big Six” civil rights leaders. He and his two younger siblings were raised in St. Paul, Minnesota by an aunt and uncle after the
death of their mother in 1906. One of three black families in a working class ethnic neighborhood, Wilkins attended nearly all white schools and became secretary of the local NAACP while earning a degree in journalism from the University of Minnesota. Upon graduation in 1923 Wilkins became an editor for the Kansas City Call, a black weekly newspaper. With the deaths of his aunt, uncle, and sister within weeks of each other in late 1927-1928, Wilkins’ immediate family narrowed to his younger brother. Childless through more than fifty years of marriage, he became the NAACP’s living embodiment and considered any challenge to its supremacy a personal attack on his legacy. He retired in 1977 after 46 years of service and died four years later at the age of 80.34

During his eighteen years as assistant executive secretary from 1931 to 1949, six years as acting executive, and twenty years as executive secretary then executive director (the title change occurred halfway through his tenure), Wilkins deviated little from the description that Du Bois penned of him and the NAACP under his leadership.

Although Wilkins was intelligent, Du Bois wrote,

lacks all training in social science, has traveled little and has no broad background of education. He has a staff of excellent clerks but few if any professional social workers, artists, writers or research specialists. The branches and their officials have no scientifically planned program except to raise money and defend cases of injustice or discrimination in the courts. The organization fears the process of democracy and avoids discussion. All meetings and programs are ‘fixed.’35

While Du Bois was known to speak harshly of lesser mortals, his assessment of Wilkins and the lack of democracy in the organization under his leadership was supported in
many quarters. Wilkins’ personality was in many ways as cautious, covetous, and caustic as Whitney Young’s was expansive, embracing, and energetic. A social climber with aristocratic pretensions, Wilkins was, in the words of journalist Martin Arnold, an “ever-prickly” man of “aloof charm” who seemed “to like his loneliness, his isolated pinnacle.” Smug and power hungry, he “showed little of himself to anyone and practically nothing to his juniors.” In fact, a former NAACP executive described him as “a figure rather than a human being.”

Kenneth Clark described Wilkins as “the personification of responsible, statesmanlike leadership . . . [who] jealously guards his belief in the rational and intellectual approach to significant social change and refuses to be pushed even temporarily into the stance of the fiery leader.” To Wilkins, the oratory of black ministers was so much emotionally manipulative pablum, devoid of the hard realism that true civil rights progress required. Wilkins’ religion was his total commitment to the NAACP way. “Like a pontiff,” Martin Arnold writes, “a man of great vanity and commanding influence, he takes what he considers the long view of history. He issues biting encyclicals against those blacks who would exchange his theology of integration for separatism and who, in the process, would tear down his church, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.”

The list of those seeking to tear down Wilkins’ church grew in the 1950s when the southern campaign of massive resistance following the “Brown II” decision in 1955 made clear that the NAACP’s celebratory mood of the previous year had been both
naive and premature. Violence and intimidation against NAACP chapters in the South increased dramatically. The attacks resulted in the closing of 246 local branches, decreasing membership in the South by fifty per cent. Texas, Louisiana, and Alabama passed laws making it illegal for the NAACP to operate in those states. Georgia annulled the organization’s tax-exempt status, and “South Carolina’s public employment prohibitions decimated the Association's chapters and made outlaws of the stalwarts.” Both August Meier and David Levering Lewis agree that the attacks caused blacks to rally around the organization. In fact Lewis contends that the “primary contribution of the white South to the civil rights revolution was its assault upon the NAACP.”

The NAACP ban in southern states also created room for new organizations and leaders to grow as the NAACP focused on survival rather than progress. It was not happenstance that the SCLC was born in Alabama where there was an injunction against the NAACP. Meanwhile, the de jure imposition of segregation in the South and its de facto imposition in the North, despite the NAACP’s judicial successes in dismantling its legal constructs, demonstrated the shortcomings and limitations of the NAACP’s legislative strategy. The battle was in the streets, the NAACP’s critics argued, not in courtrooms where only highly trained civil rights specialists could enter. Middle-class Negroes wanted a stake in their own future. The success of the Montgomery boycott, in particular, brought into question the legal and legislative strategy championed by the NAACP.
So, while Wilkins had slipped easily into the top job in the summer of 1955 (he became the obvious choice to succeed White when he assumed most of White’s administrative responsibilities in 1949), any sense of triumph he must have felt in his hegemony over the movement was short-lived since the Montgomery bus boycott ignited the public career of the charismatic Martin Luther King, Jr. that December.  

For Wilkins it must have seemed a cruel joke that after waiting nearly twenty-five years to lead the 46-year-old organization, the most serious threat to the NAACP’s supremacy and his ascendancy to the top of the civil rights hierarchy would be a 26-year-old preacher and a new organization that lacked both history and structure. But King’s personal magnetism was no laughing matter since it enabled him to attract media attention and new followers, overshadowing NAACP efforts, and provided King with a measure of autonomy that frustrated NAACP efforts to control all aspects of the movement. What is more, the creation of the SCLC in 1957 provided King with an apparatus to compete directly with the NAACP by enabling many of the same ministers who supported and led local NAACP branches in the South to become affiliated with SCLC and hold rallies on its behalf.

Despite this challenge, the NAACP achieved another significant victory with the passage of the first civil rights bill since Reconstruction. While Republicans conceived of the 1957 civil rights legislation as an opportunity to divide the Democratic Party, Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson seized upon it as an opportunity to enlarge his national profile and to reclaim the support of black voters who had drifted back to the
Republican Party in 1952 and 1956. His efforts on behalf of the bill caught the eye of Wilkins, who, in the depths of the Eisenhower "freeze out" of civil rights leaders, knew he would have to look elsewhere for his "Harry Truman." Wilkins surmised that should Johnson's ambition and political savvy propel him to the Oval Office, he could become as important an ally to the NAACP, to Wilkins personally, and to the civil rights movement as Truman had been.47

Though several historians have noted the close relationship and affection between Wilkins and President Johnson, most fail to note that the roots of the alliance were planted with the Civil Rights Act of 1957.48 Although Johnson both championed and eviscerated the 1957 Civil Rights bill to secure its passage, Wilkins believed that his actions stemmed, not from being a "visceral segregationist," but from his belief that the 1957 Act "with its emphasis on voting had the best chance of enactment and also was the kind of civil rights act for which he could vote without having to apologize for it in his home district."49 Wilkins was inclined to accept half a loaf for the sake of progress, however small and incremental, believing that "If you are digging a ditch with a teaspoon, and a man comes along and offers you a spade, there is something wrong with your head if you don't take it because he didn't offer you a bulldozer." Or as future vice president Hubert Humphrey advised Wilkins, "If there's one thing I have learned in politics, it's never to turn your back on a crumb."50 But Johnson's efforts on behalf of the 1957 bill were insufficient comfort to most pro-civil rights delegates and
activists who opposed his addition to an already suspect Democratic presidential ticket in 1960.\textsuperscript{51}

Wilkins was not among this group. Even though he admitted that it would be "impolitic within the Negro and liberal community to confess such heresy publicly," Wilkins told Kennedy civil rights liaison Harris Wofford, who had approached him about gaining the NAACP's support in 1960 that, "of all the men in political life," he "would trust" Lyndon Johnson "to do the most about civil rights as President."\textsuperscript{52} So when Johnson promised a "closed session with nearly 100 skeptical Negro Democratic leaders" and pro-civil rights leaders at the nominating convention in Los Angeles, that he would do his "level best to make progress in the field of civil rights," Wilkins believed him.\textsuperscript{53} And he pitched in during the campaign to reassure the black community. Wilkins later recalled "giving a newspaper an interview at the time which said that we shouldn't discount the effectiveness of Lyndon Johnson on the ticket because he brought enormous knowledge of government and workings of government to the post of Vice President if he should be elected."\textsuperscript{54} Johnson, Wilkins explained, "knew where all the trails went, where all the bodies were buried. He knew where power was, who had the power to do what," providing "the legislative experience Kennedy so obviously lacked."\textsuperscript{55} These were qualities an "old pro" like Wilkins valued; qualities that he and Johnson possessed; qualities that, to his mind, movement newcomers and the masses valued too little.\textsuperscript{56}
But legislative and lobbying experience were not the order of the day as the movement entered a new phase in the early 1960s. Dissatisfied with the largely unenforced legislative and judicial crumbs won by NAACP lobbyists and lawyers in the 1950s, the direct action campaigns of the 1960s enabled the masses to express their discontent while participating in their own freedom struggle in a way court cases, lobbying, and paying membership dues could not. Wilkins and the NAACP leadership, as they had been in the 1940s, were leery of the effectiveness of mass activism, never sure that “such an effort at such great expense would accomplish anything.” Nor were NAACP lobbyists and lawyers able to compete with the visceral excitement caused by the courageous abandon of James Farmer and CORE Freedom Riders or the sacrificial eloquence of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the ministers of SCLC. “Profoundly threatened” by the “mere existence” of newer civil rights organizations, the NAACP leadership found it “difficult to identify with and adapt to this new phase of the struggle,” discomfort they shared with the Kennedy White House.

Like the NAACP leadership, the administration was uncomfortable with the tendency of direct action advocates to cast civil rights progress in the context of a social movement rather than traditional interest group politics. The preference of direct action organizations for “mass mobilization over elite negotiations, their propensity to confront issues directly rather than exerting pressure through Washington lobbying...[and] their desire for public attention and controversy rather than quiet coalition building,” created an emotionalism that distanced organizations like CORE,
SNCC and the SCLC from the NAACP and the administration. Ambitious politicians like Kennedy and Johnson, who was particularly adept at horse-trading and counting votes, were much more comfortable with the lobbying techniques of the Urban League and the NAACP.\(^{59}\)

Therefore it is not surprising that both the Kennedys and Wilkins opposed the Freedom Rides, albeit for different reasons. While the Kennedys were concerned about the international repercussions of the social chaos that was likely to ensue, Wilkins’ was concerned with the ideological and financial aspects. Attempting to dissuade Farmer, Wilkins cited the high financial costs of “mass arrests with high bail bond, exorbitant lawyers’ fees and enormous costs for multiple appeals piled on top of multiple appeals.” Striking a familiar note, Wilkins argued that “All we really need is one good test case so we can fight it out in the courts and put an end to segregated travel in this country, just as we reduced the concept of segregated schools to ashes.” Fortunately, Farmer did not heed Wilkins’ advice and today the buses and bus terminals are desegregated both by law and in fact while public schools are still only desegregated by law.\(^{60}\)

Because its views coincided with those of the administration, the NAACP came under heavy attack from chroniclers of the movement, from radicals, and from other civil rights leaders. They accused the NAACP leadership of playing “footsy with government officials” and depicted it as “more or less an arm of the Democratic Party.” And the 62-year old Wilkins was “hooted down” for most of 1963 and even “forced...
to give up his mythical leadership role in the wake of the Birmingham crisis” because he was seen as “a brake” to keep the movement from putting too much pressure on the Kennedy administration. In addition the NAACP was criticized for being too hierarchical, too bureaucratic and too undemocratic in its internal operation. And while its organizational rigidity offered a certain stability (the NAACP had only three executive secretaries in fifty years while CORE went through three in less than a decade) that prevented it from being turned sharply to the right or left by internal or external forces, that stability also made for a certain rigidity of thought and action, which made it difficult for the organization to relate to, support, or endorse new ideas. Wyatt Tee Walker, executive director of SCLC from 1960-1964, told Robert Penn Warren, “I worked within the structure of the NAACP since I was eleven years old, so I know it pretty well... I think I could pretty well document that whenever within the lines of the NAACP energetic and/or ambitious leadership begins to develop, you go to the guillotine.”

But despite the criticisms, civil rights researchers have found that the NAACP came “closer than any of the others to representing the majority voice of that community” and had the broadest cross section of support in the African American community in the 1960s when compared with other voluntary organizations, or other movement organizations. Membership surged to its highest levels in the early 1960s, peaking at more than 535,000 members in 1963, as all the “Big Six” organizations benefited from the civil rights fervor. The NAACP, moreover, the only civil rights
organization that was funded primarily by the black community with 90 per cent of its income in 1963 coming from black sources. Wilkins liked to boast that "Of all the civil rights organizations, we have the only one that is active in fifty states and in some 1,500 communities.... and we have about 40 to 42 state organizations. In other words, we have the machinery for getting word to our people and getting them into action." 64 What is more, despite the tendency of historians to generalize the NAACP membership as homogeneous, the membership actually varied by region. For example, both Cothran and Meiers found that in the mid-1960s "the NAACP in suburban New York is upper class, in Youngstown, Ohio, it is dominated by labor, in Atlanta, it is middle-class oriented," in the West tended toward professional people and in the Northeast toward "lower-middle class people such as postal workers." 65

By contrast the other "Big Six" organizations in the early 1960s were proportionately smaller, poorer, more regional, and less diverse. Until 1963 CORE was a small, mainly white, almost exclusively northern organization that re-emerged in the early 1960s after an initial burst of activity in the 1940s and a fallow period in the 1950s. By 1964, CORE still had only fifty or so local chapters but many more were now in the South and led by back members. It had a professional staff of 137 and, despite an income of $900,000 and contributions from 60,000 financial supporters, the organization was "in serious financial trouble" by 1965. SCLC had approximately 100 affiliated churches and civil organizations in thirty states, mainly in the South. King's speaking engagements were its major source of funding and Time magazine wrote in
the summer of 1963 that despite its six years in existence, "S.C.L.C. would probably fold tomorrow were King to leave it." By mid-1963 SNCC had approximately 90 field secretaries and an annual budget of roughly $100,000 to $120,000, most of it coming from foundations and voluntary contributions. By all accounts and by design, it was the least organized of the "Big Six." But for all their radical rhetoric, the black college student protesters who joined SNCC in the early 1960s "had already attained greater formal education and brighter job prospects than their working-class parents."66

Knowing that the facts were on his side, Wilkins fired back. He accused other civil rights groups of furnishing "the noise and [getting] the publicity while the NAACP furnishes the manpower and pays the bills." And he had a point, since much of the sit-in activity in 1960, though it was not sanctioned by the National Office, was carried on by NAACP youth councils and college chapters. In addition, Bayard Rustin admitted that A. Philip Randolph, in particular, "refused" to raise money, gladly leaving the NAACP holding the bill. But Wilkins never singled out Randolph for his criticism, saving it for SNCC, CORE, and "the SCLC gang of Baptist preachers." Dubbing SNCC, CORE, and SCLC fly-by-night, "here today, gone tomorrow" operations, Wilkins told NAACP supporters that "To give them your money is like a Baptist giving money to the Presbyterian Church."67

As the August 1963 March on Washington neared, the war of words between the major civil rights organizations drew attention from the national media that resulted in the creation of two diametrically opposed initiatives. The first initiative, the Council
for United Civil Rights Leadership (CUCRL), was sponsored by philanthropist Stephen Currier of the Taconic Foundation and sought to end the public backbiting exposed by March preparations by providing a forum for civil rights leaders to work cooperatively. The second was the FBI’s COINTELPRO campaign to “expose, disrupt, discredit, or otherwise neutralize’ the civil rights movement” by, among other things, sharing derogatory information about one another between civil rights leaders. Because J. Edgar Hoover knew of and shared Wilkins’ hostility toward King, the FBI routinely began to provide Wilkins with derogatory information on King that had previously gone only to the White House.

The effect of the FBI COINTELPRO campaign was twofold. First, it damaged the reputation of civil rights leaders in the eyes of the White House, reducing the field of “moderate” civil rights leaders the White House felt comfortable working with, making King in particular a virtual “untouchable.” And second, it reduced CUCRL meetings to “gripe” sessions. In light of the suspect nature of the information in the FBI files themselves and Wilkins’ lack of “candor whatsoever on the subject of the FBI” in his autobiography, Wilkins’ role in the COINTELPRO operation may never be determined. But FBI historian Kenneth O’Reilly has shown that many of the complaints and accusations raised at the CUCRL meetings resulted from negative information supplied to member groups by the FBI. And Wilkins, the only CUCRL member known to have a *bona fide* relationship with both Lyndon Johnson and the FBI, was either the instigator or source of most of the conflicts. Nonetheless one must
ask how much of the feuding was manufactured by the press and the FBI or was a function of Wilkins “prickly” personality and jealousy of King. He may well have functioned, knowingly or unknowingly, as the FBI’s most valuable Trojan Horse.\footnote{72} But if Wilkins was most often a source of dissension, National Urban (NUL) League executive director Whitney Young, leader of the movement’s “Department of State,” strove to be a force “for unity.”

Due to their Progressive-era, interracial, northern origins and their integrationist agendas, the NAACP and the National Urban League tend to be discussed in tandem by historians of the modern civil rights movement.\footnote{73} But in fact, they were quite different organizations with quite different histories, led by quite different men who at different times were both collaborators and competitors in the field of civil rights during the postwar years. In describing the founding of the Urban League, historian John Hope Franklin explained that while “the NAACP included in its program a plan for widening the economic opportunities of African Americans, it did not find time to do much in this area. The need for organized effort in the economic sphere was no less pressing, however,” so this became the work of the NUL. By mutual agreement the founders of the NUL and the NAACP divided their responsibilities in the struggle for racial advancement. The NAACP would seek political and legal equality while the NUL would focus on social welfare and economic opportunity.\footnote{74} Because its designated benefactors were the conservative business and philanthropic communities,
the NUL took a less confrontational approach to reaching its goal, which often obscured its progressive agenda of economic redress for urban blacks.\textsuperscript{75}

While the NAACP focused on legal solutions through the courts and the legislature, the National Urban League concentrated on urban unemployment, housing, social adjustment, job training, and documenting the conditions of urban blacks for the purpose of reform. Neither a membership nor a protest action organization, the Urban League focused narrowly on solving the "day-to-day economic problems of the urban poor" by persuading white philanthropists to support its training initiatives, negotiating with white businessmen to hire blacks, and preparing blacks for new employment opportunities. Unlike the local NAACP branches whose members supported the National Office, Urban League affiliates looked to the National Office for funding to support local programs. The Urban League's goal was to use these private resources to fix the people and then provide them with the opportunity for them to fit into the system.\textsuperscript{76}

Just as the NAACP turned to the courts in the 1930s, the Urban League looked to the federal government to meet the social and economic needs of the poor urban blacks when the Great Depression decimated the ranks of its primary sponsors in the business and philanthropic communities.\textsuperscript{77} Although most National Urban League officials were Republicans with little faith in the Democratic Party, Franklin Roosevelt, or the New Deal to address the needs of urban blacks, the proliferation of New Deal agencies and legislation concerned with the American workforce continued to alter the
Urban League’s focus throughout the 1930s. The National Urban League placed staff members on federal advisory boards and commissions and within government agencies through its contact with Mrs. Roosevelt and NUL vice chair and National Youth Administration Negro division director, Mary McLeod Bethune. 78 But even as the Urban Leaguers advised the government through service on commissions and committees and annual reports to the President, the Urban League’s main target was the private, not the public sector. Therefore, throughout the 1930s the Urban League maintained an excellent working relationship with the NAACP, abiding by the 1911 NUL-NAACP agreement not to duplicate each other’s efforts. 79

But the era of cooperation ended in 1941, when the new executive secretary Lester Granger sought, unsuccessfully, to challenge the NAACP for civil rights supremacy without abandoning the League’s social service orientation. Wilkins’ and Granger’s personal dislike for each other, combined with Granger’s unbending belief in the primacy of scientific social work to raise the status of Negroes and Wilkins’ equally rigid faith in legislative and judicial action, severely limited the two organizations’ ability to work cooperatively on civil rights issues. 80 Internal bickering, continuing financial woes, and Granger’s unwillingness to cooperate with other civil rights organizations in the 1940s, just as the NAACP was becoming a mass organization, marginalized the Urban League even further in a time of increasing African American militancy. 81
Unlike the enormous growth the NAACP experienced in the 1940s, the National Urban League stagnated, remaining small and nearly insolvent throughout the 1940s and 1950s, despite the fact that blacks became a predominantly urban population during these years and the work of the Urban League became more important. With only nine salaried employees on the national staff and thirty-seven, mostly northern, affiliates nationwide in 1941, the League experienced nearly two decades of staff, salary, and budget cuts negatively affecting the national office’s relationship with local affiliates and its ability to operate effectively. Like the NAACP, the NUL also endured southern attacks in the wake of the Brown decision, as segregationists sought to cut off the “race-mixing pressure group” from Community Chest and United Fund support. In order to avoid further attack, local affiliates became even more discreet and adept at hiding their successes. But in doing so they re-enforced the impression of a conservative, apathetic League, uninvolved in the struggle for racial progress. Furthermore, only one-fifth of the League’s branches were located in the South and only one-tenth of its budget was allocated to the region, despite overall budget increases in the 1950s. Granger’s acrimonious relations with other civil rights organizations, his unwillingness to support the militancy of local affiliates, and financial difficulties all contributed to the decline of the Urban League’s image in the years before his mandatory retirement in 1960.

By the time Young took over the NUL in October of 1961, the organization was deeply in debt and nearly non-existent as a civil rights presence in most urban
areas, despite the 63 affiliates nationwide. The overall budget was approximately $3.5 million, $300,000 of which went to the 29-person national office. The largest fund-raising total in any single year had been $325,000. In Young’s first year as executive director contributions more than doubled to $700,000. In 1963 they doubled again to $1,441,000. In addition to raising money, Young also struggled with the executive committee, staff members, and many local affiliates to drag the National Urban League into the civil rights movement. When he was selected to become the new executive secretary in January 1961, the executive committee hoped he would re-invigorate the Urban League as a social service organization for the urban unemployed. But Young, who had spent his adult life on the fringes of the movement, envisioned a more dynamic role for the organization. He was determined that the newest phase of the civil rights movement would include the Urban League, based on its unique skills, resources, perspective, and position within the black, white, civil rights, and business communities.

Although it set out firm rules for its participation, the 1963 March on Washington served as the League’s official “coming out party” as a civil rights organization. Young convinced the League’s executive committee to support the March by arguing that unless the League got involved it would be marginalized even further within both the African American community and business communities. Young also chastised local leagues for their failure to keep abreast of local civil rights initiatives, pushing them to get involved in order to maintain their credibility, relevance,
and usefulness in both the black and white communities. Unless the local Leagues identified themselves with the struggle, he warned, they could not play the all-important, bridge-building role that Young had been playing for nearly twenty years.89

Whitney Young, Jr. was born in 1921 in Lexington, Kentucky, the middle child and only son of educated, middle-class, professional parents who shielded him from the worst of the South’s racial caste system by providing him with a financially and emotionally secure upbringing, despite the hardships of the Great Depression. His father was principal of Lincoln Institute, a vocational boarding school for blacks, and his mother became Kentucky’s first black postmistress in 1929.90 Hoping he might receive the training and resources to attend medical school and unwilling to be a conscientious objector, Young enlisted in the Army in 1942 despite his misgivings about service in segregated units. During the war, in addition to digging ditches in a Jim Crow combat engineering unit, Young married and found his calling in race relations by becoming the bridge between the inexperienced white officers and their all-black companies. Emboldened by being overseas and resentful of their second-class status, black soldiers refused to work without better treatment and a modicum of respect while white officers, Young explained, saw “their lieutenant’s bars, [and] captains going down the drain” because it looked as if they didn’t “have the skills for leadership.”91 Blessed with charm, ambition, a genuine love of people, good-looks, and a big, gregarious personality, Young became the mediator between the two camps. Seeking a civilian career that would fit his skills and interest in race relations, Young
earned his master’s degree in social work from the University of Minnesota on the GI bill in 1947.

In the intervening years before becoming the League’s executive director, Young honed his leadership skills and broadened his civil rights contacts while working his way through ever-more challenging assignments in the St. Paul and Omaha Urban Leagues and as Dean of the Atlanta University School of Social Work from 1953 to 1960. During his tenure at Atlanta University he not only doubled the School of Social Work’s enrollment, but also its budget and actively supported the desegregation battles waged by Atlanta University college students in 1960. A sabbatical year beginning in the fall of 1960 to study social sciences at Harvard with the financial assistance of one of the League’s major philanthropic foundations completed Young’s preparations for assuming the executive directorship of the National Urban League in the fall of 1961.

In addition to righting the League financially and pushing the affiliates to become more active, Young also returned the organization to its pre-Granger, cooperative, non-competitive relationship with the NAACP. In each city where he had worked, Young also served on the board of the local NAACP chapter. As Young biographer Nancy Weiss noted, “since the league was not involved in direct action” or as dependent on publicity for its financial support as other civil rights organizations, “[Young] was somewhat removed from the jealouslyes and rivalries among the organizations.” This distance also enabled Young to play the role of “the moderator, compromiser, mediator” in the Council for United Civil Rights Leadership (CUCRL).
James Farmer described how Young would intervene "to smooth ruffled feathers" by urging his colleagues "to remember that we all agree on objectives, and usually agree on strategy; it's on the tactics of the moment where we disagree." Because of this distance Young could open a CUCRL meeting, shortly after Martin Luther King, Jr. received a spate of publicity for his most recent arrest, by joking "The meeting will come to order, and I want to begin the discussion by saying, boy, it's sure tough these days trying to be a civil rights leader without going to jail." Everyone, including Dr. King, would laugh.

But unlike Wilkins and other NAACP officials who distrusted direct action campaigns, Young appreciated the need for demonstrations and protest even if the League did not directly participate in them. "I can remember on many occasions pointing out that the old, old methods had been used for so long and had proven ineffective," Young explained. "[Therefore] people who found the newer methods of confrontation distasteful had only themselves to blame for not going along with the more polite and more reasonable kinds of appeals that organizations like the Urban League and people like myself had made. So I was in no position to criticize the methods as long as they were not violent, as long as my methods hadn't worked." And Young's belief that "building the house of democracy requires a diversity of methods, a variety of approaches" imbued the entire Urban League, according to Kenneth Clark, with "a degree of flexibility not yet so clearly apparent in the NAACP."

The executive director of the Cincinnati Urban League told reporters in 1963, "Our
behind-the-scenes work is just one way to handle the problem. We know the other
groups and other techniques also are needed. We don't claim any prior rights in the
work in behalf of equal opportunity.”99 In fact the need for “a variety of approaches”
validated the need for the Urban League.

In Young’s view, every organization had a different, but equally important, role
to play. The work of the Urban League simply complemented rather than competed
with the activities of other civil rights organizations. Young explained, “You can holler,
protest, march, picket, demonstrate, but somebody must be able to sit in on the strategy
conferences and plot a course. There must be the strategists, the researchers, and the
professionals able to carry out a program. That’s our role.” As Young explained to the
New York Times, “There is no such thing as a moderate in the civil rights movement,
everyone is a radical. The difference is whether or not one is all rhetoric or
relevance…. It is no longer a question of who’s militant, but who is efficient. Our job
cannot be done without other civil rights organizations, but their victories would be
hollow if the Urban League didn’t exist.”100

Young’s inclusiveness was not due to a lack of commitment to Urban League
tactics and objectives but rather grew out of his instinctive understanding of what
sociologist Herbert Haines calls the radical flanking effect. Young knew better than
anyone that it was the alternative that made the white establishment willing to
cooperate with the Urban League. The threat posed by radicals made the more
moderate Urban League solutions more acceptable to the corporate and philanthropic
elite who not only had the money to give but who also had the greatest interest in social engineering and social peace to protect their wealth. Similarly, the federal government also had an interest in seeing that moderates won out over radicals, whose methods usually included confrontation and social disorder. Both Kennedy and Johnson preferred to work with Wilkins and Young rather than with the increasingly radical, militant, and emotional CORE or SNCC. As Frederick Douglass had asserted more than a century before, “Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never has and it never will.” For Young, other groups furnished the demand while the Urban League provided the way to concede.

The League was the movement’s “State Department” with permanent embassies in the middle of the urban fray. It was not the Urban League’s job to be radical. Diplomacy, education, and investigation were the League’s forte. The League, therefore, was “denied the luxury of rhetoric and one-night stands,” Young said. “We stay in town. It calls for a different kind of skill. If there’s no expectation of an ongoing program, then all you need to rely on is charisma and sensational rhetoric.” And like Booker T. Washington before him, Young even helped radicals when their goals coincided with those of the League in the areas of economic and political empowerment.

So while the insecure Wilkins battled radicals and militants, the more self-assured Young kept “in close contact with nationally known separatists” attempting to find common ground by defining “Black Power” as “economic power, brain power,
political power, cultural pride.”\textsuperscript{104} As in the CUCRL meetings, Young attempted to see the disagreements as differences over technique (as long as the methods were non-violent) and not objectives, and he continued to assert that no one strategy held all the answers. Young did not always succeed. But, unlike Wilkins, he felt it was worth the effort to keep the lines of communication open to all sides just as he had when he stood between the warring black GI’s and the white officers during the Second World War. It was imperative that the League and its affiliates be “able to maintain cooperation… even in times when communication between key officials and civil rights groups had broken down.”\textsuperscript{105}

The vast majority of the Urban League’s resources were devoted to providing occupational training and finding jobs for blacks. Young was so committed to obtaining employment for blacks that he would have asked the devil himself if he needed any additional workers to stoke the fires of hell. Some said Young came close to doing just that when he arranged for “an unprecedented audience with [President Nixon] and most of this Cabinet and came away with $28 million dollars in federal money for League programs” and when he approached the FBI about providing employment opportunities for blacks to be agents—“inasmuch as one of the functions of the Urban League is to place Negroes in desirable positions.” According to FBI historian Kenneth O’Reilly, “Young’s deftness, in [J. Edgar] Hoover’s view, marked him as ‘a very expedient person.’” And it was the issue of employment that finally brought Johnson
and Young together through the work of the President’s Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity (PCEEO). ¹⁰⁶

With its focus on increasing black employment through persuasion and negotiation, the PCEEO was practically a government version of the Urban League. Established by President Kennedy in March 1961 and chaired by the Vice President, the PCEEO sought to eliminate “bias because of race, creed, color or national origin in employment by the Federal Government, by government contractors, and on federally assisted construction projects.” When National Urban League president Henry Steeger offered the League’s cooperation, the Vice President readily accepted, noting their “common objectives and common goals.”¹⁰⁷ But like the civil rights organization it emulated, the effort was immediately hamstrung by its dependence on voluntary compliance. With “no budget, no power” to make compliance compulsory, the PCEEO, despite Johnson’s commitment to the project’s success, had little impact in black unemployment statistics or the racial composition of the workforce of government contractors. ¹⁰⁸

But while the committee may have been unsuccessful in addressing discriminatory hiring practices by government contractors, the PCEEO meetings took on another important function. They became a kind of tutorial on civil rights for the Vice President in much the same way that contact with civil rights leaders in an earlier era had shaped the views of Eleanor Roosevelt. According to Democratic National Committee (DNC) Deputy Louis Martin, “After the first meeting it was decided that
we should hold frequent meetings. It was a sort of black cabinet meeting with the Vice President on civil rights, the whole spectrum of those problems. He, I thought, showed exceptional realism in dealing with the problem. He was a good listener... the question of whether he was a liberal or conservative faded into the background.” Through their work with the PCEEO, Young and James Farmer of CORE began to discuss the notion of compensatory action with the Vice President.\textsuperscript{109} Although Johnson tended to be a talker, his outsider status in the Kennedy administration quieted him, causing him to listen more than talk. Black leaders like Young, Farmer, and King, who really did not know Johnson before 1960, came to trust his commitment to the cause of civil rights during his vice presidency and because of his work on the PCEEO.\textsuperscript{110}

Johnson and Young, in particular, developed a close relationship since Johnson sought the kind of information that the Urban League was in the business of collecting and keeping at its fingertips. One of Johnson’s aides remembered that the Vice President suddenly became particularly well-versed on the subject of employment discrimination against blacks, discussing the sad statistics regarding the inability of black college graduates to work within their professions. Young claimed that during these years the two talked by phone at least once a week and in person at least once a month. It is entirely possible that his account is accurate—given Johnson’s predilection for using the telephone and his ambition for a future on the national stage and given Young’s training as a social worker, his single minded focus on increasing black employment, and the obvious benefits of a close relationship with the vice president.\textsuperscript{111}
Although the two had met in the 1950s when Young testified before the Senate in support of civil rights legislation, they were re-introduced in the fall of 1961 by labor mediator Theodore Kheel at a party for Young hosted by Roy Wilkins. Kheel, the League’s immediate past president, was preparing, at Johnson’s request, an evaluation of the effectiveness of the PCEEO. Johnson’s surprise “drop in” visit to the party lasted more than an hour as he and Young discovered that they “liked and were comfortable with each other.” Their shared southern heritage provided a certain amount of familiarity and security, especially for Johnson, who was insecure around northern liberals.

And Young’s leadership style included his own version of the “Johnson treatment” since Young was known to “cajole and badger and flatter shamelessly” in pursuit of his objective.112 Like Johnson, Young enjoyed bending the actions of others to his will, but unlike Johnson, he always attempted to do so without humiliating his prey. According to Young, “The most satisfying thing is to get this man to do what you want him to—and make him think he wants to do it.” By all accounts he appeared to do just that. Like Johnson, Young was a pragmatist who practiced the art of the possible. “Personally I am not nonviolent,” Young explained, “but I’m not a fool either. I can count. I know you can’t fight a tank with a beer can.” Young argued that unlike militants and ministers he simply could not “afford the luxury of a completely dogmatic position that says, ‘I won’t make any compromises.’ Somebody’s got to deal in a very practical way with the issues,” Young explained, “and there’s nobody else who’s got
the entrée with the decision makers.” Young knew that the conservative business
community wanted most of all to work quietly, without undue attention. And he
repeatedly employed the threat of publicity-grabbing, public confrontations with
militants to extract support for Urban League programs from corporations. He cast
himself and the Urban League as the “good cop” while, often with their consent,
portraying James Farmer and CORE activists or Malcolm X and his followers as the
“bad” ones. The implicit threat was clear: “work with us or face them.”

Young claimed that within his first five years as executive director he had
personally spoken with 400 of the top 500 corporate executives to persuade them to
support League training programs. Although he was frequently criticized for spending
so much time with the rich and powerful, Young argued “Somebody’s got to talk to the
people who have something to give.” And his diligence paid off. Beginning in 1966
Henry Ford II sent the Urban League a check for $100,000 each Christmas to use
however Young deemed fit. By 1965 the overall budget was $6 million and the Urban
League was the only civil rights organization operating without a deficit. In 1966, the
overall budget grew to $20,000,000 to support the work of 76 local affiliates and a
nationwide staff of 1,000. So while the NAACP continued to be the largest, oldest,
and best-known civil rights organization, by the mid-1960s the Urban League was the
best-organized and richest. Whitney Young was the reason why.

But perhaps more importantly, his constant personal and professional
interaction with the men whose wealth and power equaled and in many cases exceeded
Lyndon Johnson’s meant that Young was perhaps less awed than Wilkins by a call from the Oval Office. Not that Young wasn’t impressed with being able to call the president, but in addition to the mutual admiration and respect there was also a strong utilitarian element on both sides of the relationship between Young and the President, a kind of reciprocity that seemed missing from the relationship between Wilkins and Johnson.116

A perfect example of this reciprocity is the interaction between Young and Johnson in the immediate aftermath of the Kennedy assassination. With the exception of a handful of the most knowledgeable members of the civil rights leadership, for most black Americans Lyndon Johnson was an unknown quantity except for the troubling fact that he was southern. “When Lyndon Baines Johnson was sworn in as the 36th President of the United States, a wave of dejection began to spread across Negro America,” wrote Jet magazine’s Washington bureau chief, Simeon Booker. “The new President had no civil rights image nor wide admiration among Negroes.” Despite his previous efforts on behalf of two civil rights bills and as chair of the PCEEO, it was instantly clear that “Johnson’s weakest flank was still in the area of civil rights.”117

Johnson knew as much and immediately reached out to the civil rights leaders who knew him to enlist their aid in assuaging the fears of the black community, the civil rights leadership, and the black press.118 Johnson spoke to Young just two days after the Kennedy assassination. Their conversation was emblematic of their relationship. When Johnson asked for his help, Young assured the new president of the black
community’s confidence in him and promised to deliver the same message to the press. Johnson immediately invited Young to the White House and asked him “to give some thought to what our approaches ought to be and who we ought to talk to” to make sure that everyone involved was pulling “in the same direction” on the pending civil rights legislation. Young concurred, remarking that he had “some ideas” he wanted to share with Johnson “the sooner, the better.” As the conversation drew to a close the two men shared a laugh as Johnson, in referring to his aide Bill Moyers, began to spell out the last name. Young remarked that he already knew Moyers who had spoken at the Urban League convention the previous summer. Johnson quipped, “No wonder he hasn’t been worth a damn to me! He’s running around with you all the time.”

But before letting the President go, Young offered the first of what would become a series of “quick suggestion[s]” that would influence the rhetoric of the early Johnson administration. Young told Johnson that his upcoming address to the joint session of Congress should stress “that hate anywhere that goes unchecked” would only spread and linked the Kennedy assassination to the deaths of the four little girls in the Birmingham church bombing in September. Johnson agreed, telling Young that he had already “dictated a whole page on hate.” Nonetheless, the next day Johnson took up Young’s suggestion with presidential speechwriter Ted Sorensen, telling Sorensen that while he “rather liked” the draft written by John Kenneth Galbraith he needed Sorensen to add “a little more on the ‘hate’ stuff.” Presidential scholar Michael Beschloss acknowledged that “Johnson’s desire to inveigh against ‘hate’... owes much
to his earlier conversation... with Whitney Young.” It would not be the last time Young influenced the President’s rhetoric.\textsuperscript{120}

But Young’s influence was first evident in his contributions to the Johnson administration’s effort to shore up the President with the black community and the black leadership. Fulfiling his promise to speak publicly on Johnson’s behalf Young did so with his unique brand of identification, sympathy, and reassurance. He acknowledged the unease by admitting that “Ten years ago if we had heard a new President speaking in a deep Southern drawl, there might have been so much fear among Negro leaders that some of us might have gotten on the next boat for Ghana.” But he quickly added “we [the black leadership] know where Lyndon Johnson stands and we realize that he is a sincere and dedicated supporter of civil rights. A magnolia accent doesn’t mean bigotry.”\textsuperscript{121}

And Johnson’s tutelage as vice president under Young paid off almost immediately as he began meeting individually with civil rights leaders to gain their support during his first few weeks in office. A. Philip Randolph concluded that Johnson was the most knowledgeable about civil rights because of this contact with the black leadership. “President Roosevelt didn’t have the contact with the Negro leaders that President Johnson has had... President Truman, for instance, was a man committed to civil rights but he was not as accessible as President Johnson.”\textsuperscript{122} In fact the strongest impression that each of the leaders came away with was that they would finally, finally, be dealing with the president himself.\textsuperscript{123} But the apparent suddenness of Johnson’s
accessibility to black leaders was largely due to the fact that his previous contacts had been well-hidden behind the Kennedy luster. Few knew that Johnson had been meeting with civil rights leaders for over two years as chair of the PCEEO or that the expressions of support from leaders like Whitney Young were the result of an on-going relationship rather than immediate political expediency.

Knowing that his first test with both the black community and civil rights leaders would be the pending civil rights legislation, Johnson followed the advice he had given his predecessor by rushing to assure the black leadership of his moral commitment to civil rights and his personal commitment to the pending civil rights legislation almost immediately upon taking office. In his first two meetings with civil rights leaders, Wilkins and CORE's James Farmer, Johnson gave "unmistakable notice" of the seriousness of his intent.\textsuperscript{124} Wilkins wrote, "It was the first time I had really felt those mesmerizing eyes of Texas on me. When Lyndon Johnson wanted to sell an idea, he put all his being into the task. Leaning forward, almost touching me, he poked his finger at me and said quietly, 'I want that bill passed'" (Wilkins' emphasis).\textsuperscript{125} Similarly Farmer's meeting provided a snapshot of the new president's determination, volubility, commitment, shrewdness, and vulgarity,

Mr. Farmer, I've got to get this civil rights bill though Congress, and I'm going to do it. If I never do anything else in my whole life, I'm going to get this job done. It won't be easy, but I'm going to do it. I have to get some of the Republicans on our side. You civil rights leaders can help me on that. You all should tell the Republicans that if they vote for this bill, you'll tell your people to vote for them. And I think you should, too; if they vote for this bill, you should tell people to vote for them. If I
can’t get the Republicans, then I’m going to have to get the Dixiecrats. That’s the southern Democrats, you know. That’s really going to be hard. I don’t know how I’m going to do it, but somehow I’m going to have to break down their resistance. Somehow I’ve got to get my hand under their dress.”

Johnson’s sense of urgency derived from several sources. The first was his belief that he was no longer bound by the restrictions of being a Southern representative. As President he had sworn to represent the entire country. When Farmer asked about his newfound commitment to civil rights Johnson replied, “I’ll answer that question by quoting a friend of yours. ‘Free at last, free at last, thank God almighty, I’m free at last.’” Second, Johnson believed that progress on civil rights would not only help him personally but just as the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960 had catapulted him to the national stage, the 1964 Act would also save other southern politicians from the debilitating burden of a “Jim Crow” legacy which separated them from the rest of the country and limited their potential as national leaders. Third, through the Civil Rights Act he believed he had found a way reconnect the South to the rest of the country, rescuing it from the scorn that had been heaped upon the region since the Civil War.

Finally, on a more personal level, Johnson wanted to remove the Southern conservative tag from his back in order to be elected by a landslide in the fall and to pursue a legislative legacy that surpassed not only his immediate predecessor, but also his political mentor and hero, Franklin Roosevelt. Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach claimed that once in the presidency, Johnson “‘bent over backwards’ to
wipe out the Southern part of his background. He told biographer Doris Kearns Goodwin, "I knew that if I didn’t get out in front of this issue, they [the liberals] would get me. They’d throw up my background against me, they’d use it to prove that I was incapable of bringing unity to the land I loved so much... I couldn’t let that happen. I had to produce a civil rights bill that was even stronger than the one they’d have gotten if Kennedy had lived. Without this, I’d be dead before I could even begin." But some in the liberal community already perceived benefits of Johnson’s southern heritage. Bayard Rustin remembered that “Johnson's behavior as Vice President caused me to write an article two days after Kennedy's assassination, in which I said that I didn't think people ought to be fearful... perhaps a Southerner would be able to do more than a Yankee, particularly with a Boston accent, to get some things done in Congress that no one else had.... I'm glad to say that the prediction I made at that time proved to be prophetic.”

The endorsements from influential black leaders provided Johnson with the time he needed to prove himself to suspicious blacks and liberals. After his first meeting with the new president, Wilkins told waiting reporters “We have very great faith in the new President's attitude on civil rights... Johnson enjoys respect in the Negro community.” The strong endorsement would contrast sharply with Wilkins’ assessment of Johnson’s successor: “He say so good but he do so po’.” Having already publicly and privately offered his support, Young, after his meeting, emphasized that the new President had agreed to “give serious thought to the Urban League proposal for a ‘crash program’ to
ease Negro unemployment.” The statement was typical of Young in its focus on jobs and the unmistakable implication that Young had gone in with an agenda of promoting the Urban League vision. Johnson even received support from the most widely read publications of the national black press. D.C. bureau chief Simeon Booker urged Jet readers to give Johnson “an opportunity to prove himself” based on his record as an advocate for “employment opportunities [for] thousands of Negroes as the spearheader of the Equal Opportunity Committee” and Ebony magazine, with its circulation of nearly three-quarters of a million, ran a favorable story on “What Negroes Can Expect from President Lyndon Johnson” in its January 1964 issue.

With black leaders now granted access and support at the presidential level a different concern emerged. As Jet’s Simeon Booker pointed out in an almost eerily prescient turnabout which seemed to repudiate direct action, “The big question now is whether Negroes themselves can become a part of a team under a southern President to make politics pay off... or whether we will dissipate our energies in more far-flung demonstrations in the streets.” For the first time, as 1964 dawned, it appeared that the president, civil rights leaders, and their followers “were united by common goals and common agreement on the rules of the game.” For those who played by the rules, the president was a powerful ally. With the president just a phone call away, Wilkins would defend his turf against “Young Turks” in and outside the organization while Young pushed corporate executives to finance the Urban League’s place within the movement. With his commitment no longer in question, Lyndon Johnson would prove
his ability to lead and unite the nation and secure his place in history by mounting a legislative legacy rivaling that of his mentor, Franklin Roosevelt. Everything seemed possible. And for a brief time everything was.\textsuperscript{136}
ENDNOTES

1 Farmer, *Lay Bare the Heart*, 218.


4 Louis Martin, Oral History, Tape 1, 22, LBFL. For similar expression on reconstructed southerners see Andrew Young, Oral History, LBFL, 2; Whitney M. Young, Jr., Oral History, LBFL, 2.


7 Miroff, “Presidential Leverage over Social Movements” 2-23; Stern, *Calculating Visions*


9 Wilkins was as deeply and irrationally jealous of Martin Luther King, Jr. as Johnson was of the Kennedys. For more on Johnson’s feelings of inadequacy and paranoia regarding the Kennedys see Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson*, 162-67, 199-202; Bluma Steinberg, *Shame and Humiliation: presidential decisionmaking on Vietnam: a psychoanalytical interpretation* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996), 63-74; and Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 7, 49, Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy and his Times*, 671-4.


13 Memo from Roy Wilkins to Walter White, 12 March 1941, Box 166, File “Carnegie-Myrdal Study Negroes in America, 1941-42,” NAACP Papers, LOC.
14 Meier and Bracey, “The NAACP as a Reform Movement,” 11, 16; Sitkoff, A New Deal for Blacks, ch. 9. Memo from Wilkins to White, 12 March 1941, Box 166, File “Carnegie-Myrdal Study Negroes in America” Letter from White to Gunnar Myrdal, 20 December 1939, Box 122, File “Myrdal Study, 1939,” NAACP Papers, Aaddendum, 1941-42,” NAACP Papers, LOC. For more on the agreed to division of labor between the NAACP and the Urban League see Weiss, National Urban League, 64-7.

15 Anderson and Franklin contend that the NAACP did little to address the economic issue. Meier, Bracey, and Sitkoff are more sympathetic. Anderson, “Eyes off the Prize,” ch. 1, 12 (forthcoming), 253-7; Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, 320; Sitkoff, A New Deal for Blacks, 250-1; For more on the NAACP in the 1930s see Meier and Bracey, “The NAACP as a Reform Movement,” 14-9.

16 For more on the NAACP’s battle with communist organizations in the 1930s see Wilson Record, Race and Radicaism (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964) chs. 3, 4. In fact one historian described Du Bois’ entire career as a series of feuds, first with Washington, then Garvey, then White. Meier and Bracey, “NAACP,” 17; Wilkins, Standing Fast, 154-5.

17 Branch, Parting the Waters, 49-50.

18 Branch, Parting the Waters, 50; O’Reilly, Black Americans, 425; Wilkins, Standing Fast, 152-4; Du Bois, The Autobiography, 107; Sitkoff, A New Deal for Blacks, 251-3; Meier and Bracey: “NAACP,” 17, 19; Nathaniel Tillman, “Walter Francis White: White’s ‘word was law and he got obedience,’” wrote journalist Simeon Booker, “... a Negro who opposed White was... banished from the crusading ranks.” Booker, Black Man’s America, 48.


22 Rosenberg, “How Far,” 426-32; Plummer, Rising Wind, ch. 4, 188; Horne, Black and Red, chs. 4, 8, 10; Von Eschen, Race Against Empire, ch. 4; Watson, Lion in the Lobby, 183-4; Wilkins, Standing Fast, 212.

23 Clark, “The Civil Rights Movement,” 250; Tillman, “Walter Francis White,” 259, 158-61, 191; Plummer, Rising Wind, 188. Although there is not much disagreement among civil rights historians that the NAACP under Walter White modulated its criticism of U.S. foreign policy and embraced anti-communism in service to the progressive civil rights agenda of the Truman administration in the postwar years, exactly

24 Marable, Race, Reform, Rebellion, 25; Von Eschen, Race Against Empire, 3. Historians James Roark and Penny Von Eschen argue that the NAACP switched from anti-colonialism to anticommunism in late 1947, just after the demise of the NAACP petition before the United Nations. Roark cites fears of McCarthyism and the fact that the civil rights movement was moving toward interracialism and assimilation while the anticolonial movement was moving in the opposite direction, toward separation, nationalism, and independence. See James L. Roark, “American Black Leaders: The Response to Colonialism and the Cold War, 1943-1953,” African Historical Studies 4 (1971), 253-70; Von Eschen references obedience to Truman civil rights policies. See Von Eschen, Race Against Empire, 109; Mark Solomon contends that the organization expressed “unqualified opposition to imperialism” in addition to supporting anti-communism until White’s death in 1955. Mark Solomon, “Black Critics of Colonialism and the Cold War,” in Cold War Critics: Alternatives to American Foreign Policy in the Truman Years, ed. Thomas G. Paterson (Chicago, IL: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 230; Plummer and Rosenberg also acknowledge the NAACP’s narrowing of the international agenda in 1955, mostly due to Wilkins’ lack of interest, but also contend that “Afro-Americans never fully abandoned that terrain [anticolonialism] and, in subsequent years, reoccupied it in force.” Plummer, Rising Wind, 30, 253; Rosenberg, “How Far,” 538-9.


26 Meier and Bracey, “NAACP,” 22; Fairclough, State of the Art, 390; Cite Dudziak.


32 For Wilkins' more narrow vision see Rosenberg, "How Far," 538-39. By contrast, Wilkins was rather cold and distant figure even with his own nephew, Roger, who after 1941 was his only living blood relation. Branch, Parting the Waters, 830-1. Arnold, "There is No Rest," 55, 58, 65.

33 The infamous "Johnson treatment" which was so effective one-on-one or in small groups did not work in larger settings or on television. For more on Johnson's image problems see Kathleen Turner, Lyndon Johnson's Dual War: Vietnam and the Press (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); David Culbert, "Johnson and the Media," in Exploring the Johnson Years, ed. Robert Divine (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 214-48; Hamby, Liberalism, 250; Booker, Black Man's America, 39; Clark, "The Civil Rights Movement," 250.

34 According to Nathaniel Tillman, "The executive leadership of the Association, as represented by its major staff personnel, has always exhibited habits of conceiving of themselves as: 1) personifying the organization, [and] 2) superior in understanding and capabilities [to] the general membership and other leadership." Nathaniel Tillman, "Walter Francis White," 199. "Board or no," wrote journalist Martin Arnold in 1969, "the NAACP is in fact run by Wilkins alone." Arnold, "There is No Rest," 325-6.


36 "No major decisions were made in the NAACP below the national level, nor outside the authority of either the Board, its chairman, the president, the executive secretary or other National Office personnel. Even the Annual Conference, an ostensibly formidable national organ, existed mainly for the purpose of receiving and approving the work of the organization as conducted and reported by officer and staff personnel... White and later Wilkins proved extremely competent in manipulating this body. The National Office prepared the agenda and the presiding officers, armed with the power of recognition, invariably came from the national level." Tillman, "Walter Francis White," 225-6. Also see Rudwick and Meier, "Organizational Structure," 12-4; Lomax, The Negro Revolt, 101-2; Warren, Who Speaks, 229; Farmer, Lay Bare the Heart, 189; Meier and Bracey, "NAACP," 27.

37 Branch, Parting the Waters, 50, 830-1; Arnold, "There is No Rest," 55; Garrow, Bearing the Cross, 269; Watson, Lion in the Lobby, 273-4; Farmer, Lay Bare the Heart, 13; On the importance of "simplification through personification" through the person on Martin Luther King, Jr. in the success of the modern civil rights movement see James Laue, "The Changing Character of the Negro Protest," in Minority Response: Comparative Views of Reactions to Subordination, ed. Minako Kurokawa (New York: Random House, 1970), 268; Clark, "The Civil Rights Movement," 256, and Rudwick and Meier, "Organizational Structure and Goal Succession," 23.

38 Clark, "The Civil Rights Movement," 250.

39 Taylor Branch noted Wilkins' capacity for "self-pity" (and subtle criticism) in his remark to President Kennedy after the March on Washington that it had been his "sad lot... in this afternoon of superlative oratory, to be the one to deal rather pedantically and pedestrianly with the hard business of legislation. And the other gentlemen were free to soar in the wild blue yonder." Branch, Parting the Waters, 883.
Arnold, “There is No Rest,” 40; Wilkins, Standing Fast, 20.

Historian Carl Degler explained that one of Myrdal’s greatest failings was his “underestimation of the power of racist thought among whites... [T]o make race prejudice principally class prejudice is to lose the insight into reality that is implied in concepts like caste and color prejudice.” Carl N. Degler, “The Negro in America—Where Myrdal Went Wrong,” New York Times Magazine, 7 December 1969, 155. David Southern’s claim that the NAACP hierarchy was infected with a bad case of Myrdalism in the 1950s is confirmed by Wilkins, Watson, and Marshall. See Southern, Gunnar Myrdal, 229-30; Wilkins, Standing Fast, 214-5; Watson, Lion in the Lobby, 183-4; Thurgood Marshall Oral History, 13, LBJL.


Although Wilkins considered May 17, 1954 “one of life’s sweetest days,” Brown was really White’s “crowning achievement,” officially occurring under his leadership. As NAACP publicist Denton Watson wrote, White had “provided the organizational structure and inspiration that enabled Thurgood Marshall to fulfill his dream. He built an institution, the mighty NAACP ship.” Watson, Lion in the Lobby, 272. Haines, “Black Radicalization,” 33; Clark, “The Civil Rights Movement,” 256; Meier and Bracey, “NAACP,” 27.


Wilkins wrote, “All through the next eight months, the most important figure in the struggle for the 1957 Civil Rights Bill was Lyndon Baines Johnson, the old Br'er Fox of the Senate--and the most capable politician I ever met. In those days, Johnson was just beginning to get religion on civil rights. The historical, irreversible impact of the Supreme Court's ruling in Brown v. Board was not lost on him...” Wilkins, Standing Fast, 243, 276. Johnson was also the only senator from old Confederacy not to sign Southern Manifestos in 1954 and 1956. Billington, “Lyndon B. Johnson and Blacks,” 41; Conkin, Big Daddy, 140-3.

49 Wilkins, *Standing Fast*, 276; Monroe Billington who wrote, "The story of Johnson's public stance on civil rights is one of evolution, of maturation, of growth.... The practical situation tempered his private attitudes. He had often told blacks that he would help them when [he] had the power and when the timing was right; when those two conditions were met he carried out his promises." Monroe Billington, "Lyndon B. Johnson and Blacks," 42. For a similar reading of Johnson see Patricia Roberts Harris, Oral History, *LBJL*, 6; Whitney Young, Oral History, *LBJL*, 2, 18; Roy Wilkins, Oral History, *LBJL*, 2.


51 As James Farmer explained "...I was one of those who opposed his getting the vice presidential nomination... Frankly I considered it most unfortunate, probably be a disaster, because of his Southern background and his voting record on civil rights. James Farmer, Oral History, *LBJL*, 2; Fairclough wrote that "In 1959 like most liberals, [Martin Luther] King regarded Lyndon B. Johnson, then the majority leader in the Senate, as a Southern conservative who was completely unfit to occupy the White House as the head of a Democratic administration." Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America*, 174.

52 Wofford agreed, "I think Roy was not too far wrong on that. Civil rights really was something that, by this time, was burning pretty strongly in Johnson." Wofford, *Of Kennedys and Kings*, 46-7; But Johnson biographer Paul Conkin disagrees contending that Johnson's Senate support for civil rights was based purely on political motives and that like Kennedy, Johnson's "moral passion" on the issue would develop over the next three years. Conkin, *Big Daddy*, 143.

53 Chester L. Washington, "LBJ 'Bares Soul' Over Civil Rights," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 23 July 1960, 6. According to Thurgood Marshall, former NAACP executive secretary Walter White did not share Wilkins favorable opinion of Johnson. White "got very angry with him and stayed angry until he died, as a matter of fact," according to Marshall because "[Johnson] just wouldn't support any of the legislation the NAACP was after... Roy did not have the same opinion of him. Roy had a better opinion of him. He felt that he was the type of man in the Senate who could get things done, but he didn't. But he could have. He just chalked it up to politics... As a matter of fact, Roy had very good thoughts about him. Instead Wilkins focused on more intrinsic qualities he felt would be important for maintaining a positive relationship in the future: "he had not often seen eye to eye with us, but he had been honest, telling us what he intended to do and keeping his word when deals were possible." Thurgood Marshall, Oral History, *LBJL*, 2-3;


56 "A Master of Power: Roy Wilkins," *New York Times*, 17 July 1967, 21. Wilkins criticized student activists for their lack of perspective saying, "... these young people in the movement, like young people everywhere, are inclined to think that nothing worthwhile was done until they came along. But how can you understand the importance of this moment if you don't remember that in 1917 the NAACP was fighting desperately to persuade Woodrow Wilson, a good President and a good man, to say just one word against lynching?" "Moment of History," *The New Yorker*, March 27, 1965, 39.

57 O'Reilly, *Black Americans*, 425; Booker, *Black Man's America*, 50; Both Farmer and Rustin noted how
Wilkins liked to needle King about the efficacy of his direct action campaigns. In one exchange Wilkins asked “In fact, Martin, if you have desegregated anything by your efforts, kindly enlighten me.” To which King replied, “Well, … I guess about the only thing I’ve desegregated so far is a few human hearts.” Farmer, *Lay Bare the Heart*, 216.


59 Miroff, "Presidential Leverage, 5; Lawson, “Mixing Moderation with Militancy,” 82-116; Harry McPherson quoted in Hampton and Fraser, *Voices of Freedom*, 337-8; Clarence Mitchell, Oral History, LBJL, Tape 1, 5.

60 Farmer, *Lay Bare the Heart*, 13; Kenneth Clark wrote in 1966 that the NAACP was so wedded to its single purpose “the techniques, methods and organizational structure of the NAACP in 1965 are essentially the same as they were in the 1920s.” Clark, “The Civil Rights Movement,” 249. CORE historians August Meier and Elliott Rudwick noted that “while the legal cases… took years to settle in the courts, the Freedom Rides… largely solved the interstate transportation issue within a matter of months.” Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 143; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 433-3.

61 Booker, *Black Man’s America*, 50, 62; Arnold, “There is No Rest,” 41. Bruce Miroff asserted that any White House “can be expected to utilize whatever leverage it possesses to slow down a social movement, and to contain its action within moderate limits,” Miroff, “Presidential Leverage,” 12. James Farmer agreed admitting that “If we were the administration, we’d want to keep it cool.” James Farmer, Oral History, LBJL, 19.


65 Meier concluded in 1963 that “it would be impossible to make any generalizations about the sources of NAACP branch membership and leadership today because the variations from branch to branch are so considerable.” Meier, “Negro Protest Movements and Organizations,” 27.

66 Laue, “The Changing Character of the Negro Protest,” 270-3; Clark, “The Civil Rights Movement, 262-


68 For more on CUCRL see Weiss, “Creative Tensions,” 41-8. Opinion varies widely on the net result of the intense competition between civil rights groups in the first half of the 1960s. Most historians believe that the competition was useful in pushing more established groups to the left as they tried to stay relevant. And such tensions also legitimized moderates in what sociologist Herbert Haines dubbed “radical flanking.” Also see Elinson quoted in Meier and Rudwick, “Organizational Structure,” 29-30; Haines, Black Radicals, 1-14; Kenneth Clark also saw the competition between groups as a sign of “democracy, health and the present strength of the movement rather than a symptom of weakness. The variety and loose coordination can help revitalize each through dynamic competition. Each organization influences the momentum and pace of the others.” Clark, “The Civil Rights Movement,” 265. Meier, and Bracey, “NAACP,” 27; Meier, “Negro Protest Movements and Organizations,” 30. But David Garrow disagrees, considering the in-fighting “debilitating.” But this is an unusual argument since the period of “debilitation” coincides with the movement’s most active and productive era. See Garrow, “Commentary to Creative Tensions,” 55-64.

69 FBI historian Kenneth O’Reilly wrote “In linking King to the Communist party, [the FBI] hoped to make a public case about the basically un-American nature of the civil rights movement. They devoted themselves to a campaign of education directed to the proposition that racial justice was dangerous…. by the summer of 1964 the FBI had focused its attention not only on King but on all civil rights leaders and all race related events.” O’Reilly, Racial Matters, 139-40.

70 For example O’Reilly connects Wilkins’ opposition to Rustin’s role in the March on Washington to the fact that the FBI had leaked derogatory information on Rustin to Whitney Young and Roy Wilkins. Yet it apparently had little affect on Young who personally saw to it that Rustin organized the March behind the scenes. O’Reilly, Racial Matters, 106, 135-7; Weiss, Whitney M. Young, 105-6; O’Reilly, Black Americans: the FBI Files, 424-5.

71 For FBI’s role in poisoning King’s relationship with Kennedy and Johnson White Houses see O’Reilly, Racial Matters, ch. 4; Garrow, Bearing the Cross, 272-3; Branch, Parting the Waters, 861-2, 904; Schlesinger, Robert Kennedy, 378-92; James McPherson, Oral History, LBJL, Interview V, Tape 1, 10.

72 O’Reilly, Racial Matters, 106, 137; O’Reilly, Black Americans: the FBI Files, 424-5; Branch, Parting the Waters, 903; Garrow, “FBI Political Harassment,” 18; Farmer, Lay Bare the Heart, 217-19; Garrow, The FBI, 148.

74 Franklin, From Slavery, 320.
75 Haines, Black Radicals, 18; Simeon Booker, Black Man’s America (Englewood Cliff, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), 41; Andrew Young called the reforms Whitney Young envisioned “a potential revolution.” See Andrew Young, “Whitney Young: working from the middle,” Life, March 26, 1971, 4. For a less sympathetic reading of Young’s plan see Hugh Davis Graham, The Civil Rights Era: Origins and Development of National Policy, 1960-1972 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 111-3. Wilkins, on the other hand, rejected affirmative action, just as he had rejected addressing economic parity in the 1930s, because he defined the goals of the movement in terms of individual liberty and freedom which were consistent with the liberal consensus which felt compelled to provide only technical guarantees of legal equality through passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Farmer, Lay Bare the Heart, 221-2; William H. Chafe, “The End of One Struggle, the Beginning of Another.” Comment: J. Mills Thornton III in The Civil Rights Movement in America, ed. Charles W. Eagles, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1986) 127-55.
78 Parris and Brooks, Blacks in the City, 237-8. In 1945 the Secretary of the Navy sent Granger to all the major Navy installations to report on the progress of efforts to integrate the service. Upon his return Granger briefed the top Navy brass on his findings and earned the Distinguished Service Cross. In 1948 Granger was selected to be member of the President’s Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services, known as the Fahy Committee. Parris and Brooks, Blacks in the City, 340-1. NUL industrial relations head, Julius Thomas received Selective Service Medals for his consulting work with the Selective Service System “regarding occupational and employment matters concerning Negro veterans.” Parris and Brooks, Blacks in the City, 304-5.
79 Moore, Search for Equality, 78; Weiss, NUL, 65; Parris and Brooks, Blacks in the City, ch. 24; Sitkoff, A New Deal for Blacks, 248-9.
80 Moore, Search for Equality, 96, 112; Weisbrot, Freedom Bound, 38; Weiss, Whitney M. Young, 103; Sitkoff, “Racial Militancy,” 680.
81 The Urban League gave “waver ing support” to 1941 March on Washington Movement because Randolph sought a racially exclusive march in violation of the NUL’s policy of interraccialism. Wynn, The Afro-American, 44; Moore, Search for Equality, 93, 96. In addition the National Urban League leadership was staunchly Republican and in the 1940’s Granger assailed FDR for avoiding racial issues and the New Deal for being actively “anti-Negro.” Granger concluded “that little could be done to advance the Negro cause with a Democrat in the White House.” Of course this did not endear the National Urban League to the Roosevelt White House which excluded the organization from the handful of meetings FDR had with other civil rights leaders like A. Philip Randolph and Walter White. Parris and Brooks, Blacks in the City, 288; Moore, Search for Equality, 94, 116.
82 Parris and Brooks, Blacks in the City, 285, 293.
83 Parris and Brooks, Blacks in the City, 350; Moore, Search for Equality, 96-101; Weiss, NUL, 65.
84 Parris & Brooks, *Blacks in the City*, 367-9. Parris and Brooks wrote “In the slower, milder days before the acceleration of the fifties, the NAACP had been considered the militant, even the radical organization. The United Negro College Fund was considered the staid, arch-conservative agency. And the Urban League was seen as middle-of-the-road and hopelessly middle-class... Now the NAACP itself was considered old-hat, stick-in-the-mud, hopelessly middle-class. If yesterday’s tiger shrinks to today’s tabby, what becomes of yesterday’s house cat?? That was the NUL’s quandary.” Parris & Brooks, *Blacks in the City*, 398.


88 Louis Lomax claims that while Young was earning his masters degree in social work at Minnesota he also joined CORE and participated in student sit-ins that integrated eateries near the university. He also claims that as dean of the Atlanta University School of Social Work, Young, along with Martin Luther King, provided protesting students with “a powerful source of wisdom an guidance” and that Young and Morehouse professor of philosophy, Samuel Williams served among King’s “close friends and advisors” providing him “with insights and techniques which his theological background did not afford.” Louis Lomax, *The Negro Revolt*, 213-4. While other Young biographers concur with Lomax’s assertion that both Bayard Rustin and King consulted briefly with Young in the 1950s and that Young supported the Montgomery bus boycott and the student sit-ins in Atlanta, neither corroborate Lomax’s conclusions regarding a close relationship with King in the 1950s or his membership in CORE in the 1940s. In both cases Young appears to have been more consultant-observer than advisor-participant in direct action campaigns of the 1940s and 50s. Dickerson, *Militant Mediator*, 100-7; Weiss, *Whitney M. Young*, 65-7.

89 Weiss, *Whitney M. Young*, 109; League Executive Committee Minutes, April 11, 1963, Young Papers, Box 12, Folder: Administration 1963, Board Committee Executive, 5-6, Columbia; Memo from Whitney Young, Jr. to Executive Directors of Urban League Affiliates, June 7, 1963, NULP, Part III, Box 476, Folder: Research Department, Young, Whitney M., January 1963-March 1964 (2 of 4), LOC. Young argued that “given the rising expectations of Negroes, the Urban League either was going to intelligently associate itself with these hopes and intervene and cooperate or it wouldn’t have been of any use at all.” Gene Grove, “The Urban League Turns a Corner,” *Tuesday*, August 1966, 15; “Whitney Young, Power Player, *Newsweek*, May 15, 1967, 29.


91 Young explained that while the soldiers “couldn’t articulate anything like black pride... they were able to criticize the hypocrisy of their having to fight for democracy” by refusing to obey orders. “It got to the point,” Young said, “[the white officers] were afraid to go out of their huts.” Tom Buckley, “Whitney Young: Black Leader or ‘Oreo Cookie,’?” *New York Times Magazine*, September 20, 1970, 80-1.


93 Lindsley Kimball remembered that while Young was at Harvard a dean called him twice to say “‘This fellow is too good to be attending classes,’ he said. ‘He should be teaching them himself.’” Tom Buckley, “Whitney Young: Black Leader or ‘Oreo Cookie,’?” *New York Times Magazine*, September 20, 1970, 82; Irwin, “The Black Power of Whitney Young,” 120-1.
94 Weiss, Whitney M. Young, 119.

95 Moore, A Search for Equality, 194; “By the time he had finished with the bromides, tempers had claimed down. Whitney Young was an asset in the search for unity.” Farmer, Lay Bare the Heart, 217; “Integration: Hotter Fires,” Newsweek, July 1, 1963, 21.

96 Farmer, Lay Bare the Heart, 216; While the Urban League was not dependent on publicity for its financial success Young did complain that “Disdents have managed to dominate public attention and draw it away from the quiet, constructive work of the Negro in his struggle for equality.” He was particularly irked by the fact that delegates were outnumbered by reporters at the 1966 CORE convention in Baltimore whereas the National Urban League convention had 1500 delegates and less than thirty reporters. Dickerson, Militant Mediator, 303.

97 The New Yorker, March 27, 1965, 39. An unnamed NAACP official criticized the Urban League asserting “You don’t have to persuade employers to hire blacks,” he went on. “It’s the law. The Urban League has never brought a single court action—not one! They don’t even have lawyers.” Buckley, “Whitney Young,” 85. When Young spoke at the at the 1968 CORE convention and argued that “in a war against racism and injustice it would be the height of folly to have only a single method of attack,” NAACP officials deemed it “a despicable attempt to court favor with the extremists.” Berg, “Black Power,” 246.


101 Herbert H. Haines, Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream, 1954-1970 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 126-8. In urging local leaders to live up to their accord after the Birmingham crisis President Kennedy reminded them that they were should be grateful for having to deal with Dr. King rather than those “sons of bitches” in SNCC who had “an investment in violence.” CORE national director James Farmer claims that the Kennedys “despised” him for refusing to call off the Freedom Rides. Garrow, Bearing the Cross, 296; Farmer, Lay Bare the Heart, 221; Also see Wofford, Of Kennedys and Kings, 153. Also see Lawson, “Mixing Moderation,” 82-116.


104 Weiss, *Whitney M. Young*, 189. On Young’s relationships with radicals and militants see Weiss, *Whitney M. Young*, 175-90. Thomas R. Brooks noted in 1969 that unlike King, Wilkins, Randolph, and Rustin, Young “possibly because his Urban League is a source of money for black projects, appears to be in favor with black militants.” Meier, Black Protest in the Sixties, 341. To the NAACP hierarchy this was anathema and pandering, earning Young their scorn for “attempting to court favor with extremists.” Berg, “Black Power,” 246.


108 Lawson, “Civil Rights,” 97. For more on the PCEEO see Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 25-27. Booker wrote that Johnson “waged a relentless drive for improvement of Negro working conditions.” Booker, *Black Man’s America*, 206; But the NAACP chief lobbyist, Clarence Mitchell concluded that “... even with the best of intentions it was not possible for that [the PCEEO] to be highly effective and it seemed to me that Vice President Johnson put a tremendous amount of effort into it and it seemed to me that he recruited a lot of good assistants. But it still was not adequate because we needed legislation.” Clarence Mitchell, Oral History, LBJL, Tape 1, 25. Others like Attorney General Robert Kennedy were less sanguine about the work of the committee, deeming it a largely toothless effort that garnered more publicity than progress. See Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy and His Times*, 360-2.

109 That both Farmer and Young had been discussing the concept with the Vice President was corroborated by Johnson’s use, without attribution, of Young’s race analogy, in his conversation with Farmer. Johnson used the same analogy (‘You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him to the starting line of a race and then say, ‘you are free to compete with all the others’ and still justly believe that you have been completely fair’), which Vice President Humphrey attributed to Young, in his Howard University speech in 1965. Farmer, *Lay Bare the Heart*, 221-2; Hubert Humphrey, *Beyond Civil Rights. A New Day of Equality*, New York: Random House, 1968, 123.

110 Louis Martin, Oral History, LBJL, Tape 1, 15; Farmer wrote, “I found the vice-president, Lyndon Johnson, more than cordial. But then, vice-presidents need friends; presidents have them.” Farmer, *Lay Bare the Heart*, 221-2; James Farmer, Oral History, LBJL, 7-8; Weiss, *Whitney M. Young*, 146-7; Dickerson, *Militant Mediator*, 245-6; Fairclough wrote that although King had considered Majority Leader Johnson unfit to be president in 1959, he was “favorably impressed” when he met Vice President Johnson. Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America*, 174.


112 Young told an interviewer, “I’m a Southerner myself, and... I have yet to see a single Southerner who
didn’t have the capacity to like, if not love, and feel very close to individual black people, though the problem of acceptance of the group was difficult.” Whitney Young, Oral History, LBJL., 2, Weiss, Whitney M. Young, 148, 157; Dickerson, Militant Mediator, 247; “Whitney Young, Power Player,” Newsweek, May 15, 1967, 29.


114 Weiss, Whitney M. Young, 4-5. “Young spent his life,” wrote biographer Nancy Weiss, “making the needs and interests of black Americans comprehensible and compelling to the whites who had the power to do something about them. Weiss, Whitney M. Young, 68, 230.


116 A reporter for Reader’s Digest noted how Young kept Johnson waiting when his call interrupted Young’s presentation before top Labor Department officials. Irwin Ross, “The Black Power of Whitney Young,” Reader’s Digest 94 (January 1969), 119-20. Although he dearly and clearly enjoyed the finer things in life and the trappings of celebrity status, Young often said, “I don’t get so flattered by floating around on some yacht that I lose sight of my goal.” “Whitney Young: He was a Doer,” Newsweek, March 22, 1971, 29; Also see “Whitney Young, Power Player,” Newsweek, May 15, 1967, 29 which noted that Young believed in paying court “where paying court pays off.”

117 Johnson wanted Young to let the black community know that he was “not a hater and a bigot” and that he was “stronger for them than nearly anybody around this place and have been for all these years.” Beschloss, Taking Charge, 147; “Negro Leaders To Support President Johnson,” and “President Johnson Phones Civil Rights Leaders,” Jet, December 12, 1963, 3-4; “Johnson Acts to Build Broad Base of National Support,” New York Times, 8 December 1963, E3; Booker, Black Man’s America, 206.

118 Simeon Booker, “What Negroes Can Expect from President L.B. Johnson,” Jet, December 12, 1963, 18-21; James Farmer knew that “Johnson had to win the confidence of black leaders, for the absence of their trust had helped deny him the nomination in 1960.” Farmer, Lay Bare the Heart, 294.

119 Beschloss, Taking Charge, 28-30.

120 Beschloss, Taking Charge, 39-40, n. 1; Weiss, Whitney M. Young, 154-55; Dickerson, Militant Mediator, 255. Young's influence was most clearly on display in President Johnson's Howard University commencement speech on June 4, 1965. In addition to Urban League claims that Johnson speech writers had consulted Young’s book, To Be Equal, during its drafting, Vice President Hubert Humphrey confirmed that Johnson had “borrowed a figure of speech from Whitney Young, Jr.” for one of its most celebrated passages. Hubert Humphrey, Beyond Civil Rights: A New Day of Equality (New York: Random House,
121 “Negro Leaders On Johnson,” New York Times, 8 December 1963, E3; In 1962 journalist Louis Lomax wrote that Young “glitters because he fully grasps the psychological quirks of the American black man. Black Muslim leader Malcolm X is the only Negro I have met in recent years who knows the soul of Negroes as well as Young does.” He could be both “one of the boys on the corner” at the same time he was counseling and working with the nation’s top industrial leaders.” Lomax, The Negro Revolt, 219.

122 A. Philip Randolph, Oral History, LBJL, 16.

123 For their ease in reaching the president personally see Wilkins, Standing Fast, 229; Whitney Young, Oral History, LBJL, 15; Andrew Young, Oral History, LBJL, 16. Farmer admitted, “I was flattered by what came to be known as ‘the Johnson treatment.’ Never before had I been called by a president…. The fact that I knew what was happening did not lessen its effectiveness.” Farmer, OH, LBJL, Tape 1, 10; Reporting on Johnson’s “crash program” in goodwill, Jet gushed: “Imagine the pride when the operator says: ‘The President of the United States wishes to talk to you.’” Simeon Booker, “Ticker Tape, USA: Confidential,” Jet, December 19, 1963, 12.

124 Although in his conversation with Young, Johnson mentioned that his next call was to Wilkins it is likely that they did not in fact speak until their meeting on November 29th. Wilkins remembers speaking to an aide but not LBJ on the phone in the week after the assassination. His recollection is partially corroborated in a memo from presidential aide Moyers to the president stating “As you instructed me to do, I told Mr. Wilkins last Saturday that you wanted to see him as soon as possible.” Roy Wilkins, Oral History, LBJL, 11; Wilkins, Standing Fast, 295. Memo from Bill Moyers to Lyndon Johnson, undated, Diary Back-Up, Box 1, Folder: Appointment File, [Diary Backup] November 29, 1963, LBJL.

125 Wilkins, Standing Fast, 296.

126 Farmer, Lay Bare the Heart, 293.

127 Farmer, Lay Bare the Heart, 293.

128 Williams, “Huey, Lyndon, and Southern Radicalism,” 287; Lawson, “Civil Rights,” 99; Wicker, JFK and LBJ, 170-5; Dallek, Flawed Giant, 24, 231; Also see Roy Wilkins, Oral History, LBJL, 24; Califano, Triumph and Tragedy, 151-2; Hamby, Liberalism and Its Challengers, 256.


133 White House Aide, Hobart Taylor and DNC Deputy chair and former newspaperman, Louis Martin, concluded that John H. Johnson, publisher of Jet and Ebony, was “probably the most influential and affluent


136 Goodwin, Lyndon Johnson, 193.
CHAPTER 3

A “COSTLY DISSIPATION OF ENERGIES AND RESOURCES”: LYNDON JOHNSON, THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND VIETNAM

“I also think it is rather essential that Roy Wilkins be the Negro leader.” ¹
Johnson Press Secretary George Reedy, November 1963

“... should we defeat every enemy, should we double our wealth and conquer the stars and still be unequal to this issue, then we will have failed as a people and as a nation... There is no Negro problem. There is no Southern problem... There is only an American problem... And we shall overcome.” ² Lyndon Johnson, March 1965

"I had waited all my life to hear a President of the United States talk that way.... at that moment, I confess, I loved L.B.J.” ³
Roy Wilkins on Lyndon Johnson’s 1965 Voting Rights Act Address

“A considerable amount of [Wilkins’] time [is] being taken up with keeping the ‘peace in Viet Nam movement’ from becoming too big a factor in the civil rights movement.” ⁴
White House Aide Hobart Taylor, August 1965

“The poverty war in the summer of its touted maturity had turned into the will-o’-the-wisp of American politics...Inevitably the buck—and the blame—ends with Lyndon B. Johnson. If he vigorously pressed for an escalated war on poverty, Congress would undoubtedly provide more funds. But the President has been uncommonly quiet about pushing ahead with the first major program he could call his own. He is preoccupied with Vietnam....” ⁵
Newsweek, August 8, 1966

Two hypotheses of this study are that the African American response to the Vietnam War pivoted upon domestic concerns related to the fight for civil and political rights and socioeconomic justice and that Lyndon Johnson’s record on civil rights was the key to African American support for the war. ⁶ The two assertions are
linked because both sides of the Vietnam debate in the African American community shared a single objective, the advancement of the cause of domestic civil rights, and a belief that the support of the federal government was crucial for achieving that objective. On one side stood those who believed that acquiescence to the administration’s foreign policy objectives in Southeast Asia would advance the cause of civil rights by insuring the indispensable support of the federal government and of a powerful president who had taken up their cause. One the other were those who felt that the United States’ continued involvement in the war undermined any hope for further civil rights progress by diverting human and financial resources to the jungles of Southeast Asia. The former supported the war. The latter did not.

Members of the moderate wing of the civil rights movement, reflecting the sentiments of an African American constituency that remained solidly, and in some cases disproportionately, supportive of President Johnson during this period, chose not to align themselves with the antiwar movement until 1967. Yet this fact is largely missing or misrepresented in most analyses of blacks and the Vietnam War in favor of a simplistic assertion that African Americans disproportionately opposed the war. This misperception has resulted from a too narrow focus on the views of Martin Luther King, Jr., an ahistorical and uncritical acceptance of the antiwar rhetoric of telegenic activists like Stokely Carmichael or Muhammed Ali, and a failure to explore the evolution of black opinion over time. While this study focuses primarily on the civil rights community, particularly the National Urban League and the NAACP, it
also seeks to present a more complex and accurate depiction of broader African American opinion on the war in the Johnson years.

This chapter will discuss the relationship between the mainstream civil rights community, the African American community, the Johnson White House, and the Vietnam War in the first three years of the Johnson presidency. This period represents an era of unprecedented legislative progress, collaboration and fragmentation for the civil rights movement. It also provides the framework for the African American response to the war in the final two years of the Johnson presidency when Martin Luther King, Jr.’s decision to join the antiwar movement in early 1967 significantly altered the relationship between these groups.

Finally, this chapter will begin to answer the basic questions at the heart of this study: Did the White House orchestrate the response of the mainstream African American leadership to antiwar civil rights activism during the Johnson years? Were specific benefits or rewards anticipated by or promised to civil rights leaders who supported U.S. policy in Southeast Asia? If so, were these benefits shared by the African American community? What were the consequences of such support? And finally, were African Americans and mainstream civil rights leaders like Bayard Rustin, A. Philip Randolph, Roy Wilkins, and Whitney Young, Jr., and their organizations, right to stick with Johnson on Vietnam?

When the “Big Six” leaders began to debate the war in the summer of 1965 they were well ahead of a broader African American community that supported the President on Vietnam despite the growing approbation of other liberal constituencies.
Nationwide Gallup polls and local surveys conducted by black newspapers found that through 1966 African Americans continued to support administration policy in Southeast Asia. When Martin Luther King, Jr. tested the antiwar waters in July 1965, he discovered that it would be a cold and lonely swim without the support of his civil rights colleagues or even the SCLC board. Indeed, contradictory events at the 1965 CORE convention demonstrated that even the more militant elements of the direct action wing of the movement had not yet reached a consensus on just how the civil rights movement should respond to the war. In fact, 1965 was a year of great turmoil for the civil rights movement on several fronts.

For civil rights activists, the year was a dizzying, wearying, and confusing juxtaposition of unprecedented civil rights victories and bitter losses interspersed with the troubling sense that the movement was losing ground to escalating tensions at home and overseas. In March, the day after Alabama state police attacked marchers in Selma, the Johnson administration took its first incremental steps toward a massive U.S. commitment to a civil war in Southeast Asia and away from a massive commitment to civil rights in the American South by sending 3500 U.S. soldiers to Vietnam. ⑦ In June, just four days after President Johnson delivered the Howard University commencement address calling for “not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result,” the State Department announced that the U.S. would provide “combat-support” to the South Vietnamese.⑧ And in August, the President sent 50,000 additional troops to Vietnam, raising the total U.S. commitment to over 125,000 men and the draft call from 17,000 to 35,000 per month
just days before he signed the Voting Rights Act surrounded by scores of civil rights luminaries inside the Capitol Rotunda and thousands of anti-war protestors outside it. And just a few days later Watts, California burst into flames.

The juxtaposition of the signing of the Voting Rights Act and the Watts riot demonstrated to both civil rights leaders and the administration the inadequacies of the legislative approach they had championed and left the civil rights movement rudderless, adrift, and in disarray. The summer of 1965 marked the beginning of the contraction of what Ben Keppel has described as the “dramatically expanded...space devoted to racial redress and social reform within American political culture.” According to Keppel this expansion had come as a direct result of the “‘rediscovery’ of poverty by Michael Harrington, the brutality of the pictures transmitted from Birmingham to the nation and to the world, and the willingness of President Johnson explicitly to cast civil rights legislation as the most fitting living memorial to President Kennedy, [which] placed the issue of racial justice above partisan politics....”9 With the legal protections now in place, whites were asking what more blacks wanted and blacks were disappointed and frustrated by the slow pace of change.10 But one very important change had definitely occurred. “There is no more civil rights movement,” claimed Reverend James Bevel, one of Martin Luther King’s principal aides told the convention of Dr. King’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference. “President Johnson signed it out of existence when he signed the voting rights bill.” As historian William Chafe noted, it was difficult “to mobilize a march when there was no theatre to desegregate, no county courthouse to picket over disenfranchisement. The
profound problems which remained—institutional racism, unemployment, absence of capital—did not lend themselves to simple slogans or easy solution.”

The “Big Five” civil rights organizations searched for answers in ways that exacerbated old divisions and yielded few successes. More moderate groups like the NAACP and the Urban League allied themselves more closely with the administration in an attempt to influence government policies. More radical groups like CORE and SNCC sought solutions in antiwar activism and the Black Power movement, neither of which gained wide acceptance in the black community until the late 1960s. But there was little doubt that by fall 1965 the movement had entered a stage that was in the words of Lee Rainwater and William Yancey, “so different from the recent or distant past as to make the familiar approaches and solutions obsolete, irrelevant, and sometimes even harmful…. Never before had the goals of the movement been officially sanctioned and championed by the government. Never before had its goals been so widely accepted” and the level of frustration so high.

The White House would realize how widespread these frustrations were when Vice President Humphrey, who chaired the PCEO, met with civil rights leaders on the presidential yacht in late September 1965. What was supposed to have been a pleasant “exchange of ideas on the future course of civil rights in America” quickly devolved into attack on the administration. Although Jet magazine noted that “the first subject to gain yacht-wide attention concerned the position of Rev. King that the U.S. civil rights movement should become interested in the Vietnam War,” Whitney Young, argued that “plenty needed to be done at home by civil rights organizations before
going overseas." The magazine concluded apparently Young had expressed the
"majority view since the conversation shifted to domestic issues." With Vietnam off
the table, the most unlikely of allies Floyd McKissick of CORE and Clarence
Mitchell, chief lobbyist for the NAACP, joined forces to criticize the Johnson
administration for its failure to enforce its own civil rights edicts in the South.14

Weeks later, still reeling from the "displeasure cruise," alarmed White House
officials met with many of the boaters to discuss the upcoming White House
Conference on Civil Rights. Their purpose, according to White House civil rights
advisor Lee White, was "to let [them] know where we stood and to insure that they did
not either take away control of it from ... designated co-chairmen or withdraw their
support from it."15 White called Wilkins, who had been away on vacation during the
cruise, into service and he did not disappoint. Afterwards White reported to the
President, "As could be expected, Roy Wilkins was the most impressive and was of
great assistance in establishing a total atmosphere of cooperation and
understanding."16 By the time the conference actually occurred more than six months
later in June of 1966, Wilkins' cooperation was beside the point. The movement was
already in pieces. Tuesday magazine, a black supplement carried in such newspapers
as the Los Angeles Herald-Examiner, the Boston Sunday Advertiser, the Cleveland
Plain Dealer, the Chicago Sun-Times, and the Philadelphia Sunday Bulletin with a
circulation of 1,400,000, reported that despite White House's hopes for finding an
issue "Big Six" leaders could rally around at the White House Conference on Civil
Rights, they "still seem no closer together than before."17

139
Nonetheless, to understand fully the course of African American opinion on the war in the Johnson years, particularly African American support, one must understand the centrality of Lyndon Johnson, Roy Wilkins, and the White House-NAACP alliance. During the pre-escalation period the Johnson administration demonstrated a unique brand of domestic politics and policies that earned the president the gratitude and loyalty of a large segment of the civil rights community, not the least of whom was the NAACP leadership, particularly Roy Wilkins.\textsuperscript{18} As head of the oldest, largest, most diverse, and best-organized civil rights organization, the only civil rights leader to have a working relationship with the FBI, and the White House choice to lead the movement, Wilkins was unique in the annals of modern civil rights and presidential history.\textsuperscript{19} From the moment he emerged from the Oval Office on November 29, 1963, after his first meeting with the new president, Wilkins willingly surrendered much of his autonomy as a civil rights advocate to be a personal friend to the President.\textsuperscript{20} From his premature declaration that November afternoon that “Mr. Johnson enjoys respect in the Negro community,” until the President’s farewell commendation for his “wise counsel...unfailing generosity, and...selfless friendship,” Wilkins served as a \textit{sub rosa} member of the White House staff operating within the civil rights leadership.\textsuperscript{21} Though Whitney Young may have been rumored to become a member of the President’s Cabinet during these years, it was Wilkins who actually behaved as one, even to the point of providing the White House with his vacation itinerary.\textsuperscript{22}
During his period of service Wilkins never gave the president any reason to
doubt his dedication to his role as a self-appointed, *de facto* member of the White
House staff.\textsuperscript{23} In just the first fourteen months between the Kennedy assassination and
Johnson's second inauguration, Wilkins engineered a moratorium on civil rights
demonstrations before the 1964 election,\textsuperscript{24} criticized the Mississippi Freedom
Democratic Party delegation's challenge to the seating of the Mississippi delegation at
the 1964 Democratic convention,\textsuperscript{25} dropped any veneer of non-partisanship for the
NAACP in the 1964 election,\textsuperscript{26} and scuttled the campaign of fellow "Big Six" leaders
to have Whitney Young named as the first black Cabinet secretary. Is it any wonder
that when White House aide Jack Valenti informed the President that Wilkins called to
say he would "be honored" to join the President for the inaugural parade, Valenti
added "--*and to tell you of his devotion to you*."\textsuperscript{27}

But while Wilkins' acts of "devotion" on behalf of the White House created
the perception of a civil rights leader with divided loyalties, they also made it difficult
to separate Wilkins' agenda from that of the President and the NAACP's from that of
the White House. For example, although lead civil rights aide Lee White assured the
president that the administration had never publicly requested the moratorium,
observers both inside the movement and close to the White House believed that
Wilkins was working on behalf of the President.\textsuperscript{28} Therefore, despite Wilkins' well-
known disapproval of direct action campaigns, CORE and SNCC considered the
moratorium yet another attempt by the White House to disapprove of, control, or even
immobilize direct action leaders. Simeon Booker, *Jet*'s Washington correspondent and
civil rights chronicler, had noted that while photos of Whitney Young and Roy Wilkins’ first meetings with the president had been featured prominently in the media, none were even taken of Johnson’s first meetings with Martin Luther King, A. Philip Randolph, or James Farmer. Booker speculated that Johnson “like JFK, was attempting to direct the course of the Negro protest by favoring certain leaders—in the fields of legislation and employment [Wilkins and Young] and by showing his feelings against leaders of constant demonstrations especially in the tense Southland.”

When both SNCC and CORE refused to support the moratorium on these grounds, it created mutual distrust and resentment between these groups and the Johnson White House, undermining the President’s initial attempts to reach out to all members of the “Big Six” leadership. This mistrust translated into an even wider breach between direct action groups and the NAACP, into SNCC and CORE supporting the Mississippi Democratic Freedom Party against the administration in 1964, into questions regarding the sincerity of white liberals and the value of interracial, non-violent resistance in 1965, and finally, into opposition to the war in 1966. Equally important, from this point forward the White House was less and less inclined to include these groups when discussing civil rights strategy, thereby severing lines of communication that might have provided the White House with the means to gain their support, or at the very least their silence, on Vietnam.

Using a variety of venues and methods, Wilkins promoted and enforced the NAACP’s “separate issues” doctrine that governed the NAACP’s response to the war
until 1970. According to Wilkins, foreign policy was “beyond the scope and comprehension of civil rights leaders who [did not] “have enough information on Viet Nam, or on foreign policy, to make it their cause.”31 Any attempt to link the civil rights and antiwar movements or criticize U.S. foreign policy in Southeast Asia was, according to Wilkins, a “costly dissipation of energies and resources” at a “crucial point” in the life of the movement and not representative of the views of most African Americans.32 Beginning in the summer of 1965 Wilkins started promoting this view to the broader public, his civil rights colleagues, and the members of the NAACP in several ways.

One of the most widely seen vehicles was Wilkins’ nationally syndicated newspaper column. The column appeared in thirty-three racially, demographically, and geographically diverse newspapers. In addition to papers with larger markets like the New York Post, the Boston Globe, the Los Angeles Times, and the Washington Star, it also appeared in the Portland Press-Herald, the Nashville Banner, the Minneapolis Tribune, and the Orlando Sentinel. When the New York Times reported in July 1965 that King had assured SCLC supporters that he did not intend “to sit by and see war escalated without saying anything about it,” and “was considering joining in peace rallies and teach-ins,” Wilkins responded in his column that “if the civil rights movement should go off on a foreign policy kick it will weaken its effectiveness in discharging its major responsibility here at home.”33 Later that summer Wilkins also used the column to chastise “peace-loving, internationally minded American Negro haranguers” for calling on blacks to “embrace as brothers-in-the-skin” a Vietnamese
people who "react to American Negroes with as much venom as do some American white people."\textsuperscript{34}

Wilkins' column proved especially useful in January 1966, when White House Aides Cliff Alexander and Lee White and Deputy DNC Chair Louis Martin turned to Wilkins for ways to "negate the impact" of SNCC becoming the first "Big Six" organization to issue an official resolution opposing U.S. policy in Southeast Asia. Wilkins assured Martin that most of the remaining members of the "Big Six" would "publicly disassociate themselves from the SNCC Policy statement" and promptly informed the press that the SNCC resolution was "not the statement of other groups of what is loosely called the civil rights movement."\textsuperscript{35} Wilkins' first column after SNCC's statement expanded on the disavowal as he explained that SNCC's resolution represented the views of "the smallest of the civil rights groups," essentially SNCC’s 23-member executive committee and its 130-person staff. "The document," Wilkins explained, "is hardly the official sentiment of 20,000,000 Negro Americans or of the many organized bodies through which they express their group opinions."\textsuperscript{36}

Another important vehicle Wilkins used to insure the movement's silence were the meetings of the Council for United Civil Rights Leadership (CUCRL). These meetings provided Wilkins with an opportunity to promote his views while gathering information regarding future actions of other member organizations. For example, when the Vietnam War was discussed at the March 23\textsuperscript{rd} 1966 meeting, Wilkins requested that Whitney Young's assistant, Enid Baird, provide him with the section of the minutes related to this discussion before it was mailed to the other members, even
though Wilkins had been present at the meeting. Although Wilkins’ views were clearly reflected in the minutes since according to Baird, “much of the discussion centered around the negative effect of identification of the civil rights movement with Vietnam,” Wilkins, nonetheless, apparently wanted an opportunity to check the official record before it was became public.37

While at first glance it would appear that Wilkins’ views dominated the meeting, closer inspection of the record reveals that the views of other leaders were represented as well.38 In fact, the two points upon which “all members” could agree were Young’s assertions that the burden should not be shifted to the poor and that the government was obligated to see to it that black veterans returned to better conditions at home.39 It even appears that Wilkins lost a few battles. Members retained the right to express their views as “acts of individual conscience,” even though such statements “have had some adverse affect on the movement” due to the public’s inability to separate individuals from their organizations. Members who chose to speak about the war were urged to do so with restraint “in view of the group’s feeling that to do otherwise would be to further dilute their major concern, confuse some friends (including the Administration), and further play into the hands of their enemies.” But Wilkins was savvy enough to turn this to his advantage, since the participants agreed to distribute their official statements on the war in advance to the other organizational heads. This would permit Wilkins to craft his disavowals and provide the White House with advance notice.40
Finally, Wilkins did not have to make such concessions when it came to the NAACP policy. He simply issued edicts to make sure local chapters did not comment on the war and to discourage them from participating in antiwar demonstrations. For example, after notice of King’s opposition to the war ran in the New York Times, Wilkins drafted a memo reminding branches, state conferences, youth councils, and college chapters that, while there was no restriction on an individual member’s right to participate in antiwar demonstrations, “in the absence of an authorizing resolution” units of the Association were prohibited from doing so. A month later the National Office issued a more restrictive press release, in anticipation of the upcoming Assembly of Unrepresented People in Washington, D.C. on August 6-9th. In addition to reminding all local units that the organization had not “passed any resolution opposing U.S. policy in Vietnam” and therefore “organized units of the NAACP” had “no authority” to participate in the Assembly, this directive urged branch officers “to heed [their] advice” regarding non-participation since they should be “mindful that it is difficult for the public to disassociate them from the organization.” The main focus of the Assembly, the press release explained, was the war in Vietnam. References in Assembly literature to the Mississippi Freedom Drive were mere “come-ons.”

So when Wilkins reported to the White House in the late summer of 1965 that “a considerable amount of his time [was] taken up with keeping the ‘peace in Viet Nam movement’ from becoming too big a factor in the civil rights movement” he wasn’t exaggerating. Apparently all his hard work paid off. Wilkins must have been delighted when lifetime member Henry Wallace complained that he was “appalled by
the conspicuous absence of Negro marchers” at the November 27, 1965 march against
the war in Washington, D.C. in the only antiwar letter received by the National Office
in 1965. Wallace closed by writing that he looked “forward to seeing the NAACP on
the honor roll for peace.” But if the NAACP leadership had their way, Wallace would
be looking for very long time.44

While Wilkins hadn’t really begun his offensive until King entered the picture
in July, other NAACP National Office staff members had been working against
incipient antiwar activism since April 1965. When the Executive Board of the Flint,
Michigan branch unanimously adopted a resolution urging “the immediate withdrawal
of American forces from Viet Nam so that the Viet Names[e] people may settle their
own destiny,” the response from John Morsell, Assistant Executive Director of the
National Office was immediate and definitive.45 The resolution, he warned, was
“without standing [and]…should not be released to public.” If it was, Morsell
demanded “its public repudiation by branch officers.” While the branch was free to
submit such resolutions for consideration by delegates to the annual convention, until
then, Morsell scolded, the branch had no authority to take a controversial position and
“promulgate it as an NAACP stand.” 46

Duly alerted, Director of Branches Gloster Current attached the Flint
Resolution and Morsell’s response as “a case in point” when he urged staff members
to remind the branches that “unless a resolution is adopted by the Annual Convention
or by the National Board of Directors, all questions on foreign policy should be
referred to the National Office.” According to Current “The left-wing in America is
having a field day! Its most recent project is to create problems over our country's
Viet Nam policy... We do not want our branches getting involved in left-wing
shenanigans. Review the 1950 Annual convention policy." A few weeks later
Current proposed a meeting of the national staff executive officers to devise a strategy
for dealing with the prospect of a "most heated" debate on U.S. foreign policy at the
annual convention.48

As it turned out, however, the most heated confrontation at the convention did
not concern the war but the leadership's relationship with the administration.
According to one account, when "a delegate from Michigan tried to persuade the
convention to take a stand against the Vietnam War, his resolution was seen ... as
representing a communist tactic... [and] the resolution, ... never even came to the
floor for a vote." But when another Michigan delegate accused the Board and the
national staff of making a deal with the Johnson administration not to vigorously
oppose a Fifth Circuit court judicial appointment in exchange for appointing an
NAACP board member to the Cabinet, both Wilkins and Washington bureau director
and chief lobbyist Clarence Mitchell took "strong exception" to the accusation.49

Given Wilkins' and Mitchell's close relationship with the administration and
the number of NAACP officials entering government service through appointments to
the executive and judicial branches, the outrage rang hollow. Within months of the
convention, Jet magazine reported that although "Nobody talks about it, ... the
NAACP virtually has taken a stranglehold on the LBJ Administration. More of its
backers are in key jobs than any other group, and the organization has become more
powerful than in any other administration.” Of course when dealing with an insecure
president known for demanding total loyalty it was not surprising the some observers
viewed the ‘stranglehold’ as going the other way.  

This was certainly the interpretation of only the antiwar letter received by the
National Office in 1965. Henry Wallace of Prospect, Kentucky wrote of his
“profound disappointment” at the [NAACP’s] failure to take a positive stand in the
peace movement,” and the failure of the civil rights community in general “to fulfill
their naturally assigned roles in opposing genocidal policies in Vietnam.” He urged
Wilkins to “speak for humanity and uphold your honor and dignity, which are worth
much more than the crumbs you might lose from the white man’s segregated table or
chit-chats with President Johnson which are conducted only to water down your
militancy.” It was a criticism that would resound in much of the Vietnam
correspondence and prove to be an important source of internal and external conflict
for the organization throughout the Johnson years.  

In an otherwise excellent examination of the NAACP’s stance on the Vietnam
war in the Johnson years, British historian Manfred Berg dismisses the
 correspondence received by the National Office on the grounds that the size of the
sample, only seventy-six letters, renders it of insignificant value. But the external
correspondence, especially when combined with information taken from inter
NAACP correspondence, Wilkins’ personal papers, polling data, and White House
records provides at least two important pieces of contextual information for any
analysis of the NAACP’s stance on the war relative to the views of the larger African
American and civil rights communities. First, the surprisingly small number of letters indicates, if not agreement, then an apparent lack of serious disagreement given the size of the organization, the broad exposure of Wilkins’ views through his nationally syndicated column and other media, and the fact that the vast increase in early 1967 is directly attributable to King joining the antiwar movement. Second, what stands out most about the Vietnam correspondence received by the NAACP National Office between 1965 and 1968 is its consistent rebuke of Wilkins’ for his verbal attacks on antiwar activists within the movement and of the NAACP’s close relationship with the Johnson White House.

In fact, of the nine letters received in 1966, all were received in the first three months after SNCC announced its opposition to the war and more than half referred to SNCC’s antiwar stance and criticized Wilkins’ attacks on the group. For example, in an angry, insult-filled response to Wilkins’ “venomous” column regarding SNCC’s antiwar statement, Judith Alexander of New York wrote, “How dare you malign the young, courageous stalwarts of the SNCC with your pernicious pen. They are truly the dedicated fighters against all inequities committed by sick-minded and diabolical men upon all humanity.” And Henry Wallace’s second letter accused the NAACP of “stabbing SNCC in the back” and warned Wilkins that,

The NAACP is fast becoming the leading Uncle Tom of the civil rights movement. You are jumping through President Johnson’s hoop so regularly and humiliatingly that you have become little more than an Administration houseboy. I wonder if you denounced Lewis only because you were so anxious to lean over backwards to show how 150 percent ‘American’ you are or because
Johnson directed you to. In any case it was a denigrating performance and we want no part of it. Wallace concluded by requesting that his name and that of his wife and five children be removed from the NAACP Honor Roll as well as the mailing list.\textsuperscript{56}

Without knowing the content of the antiwar letters it is easy to conclude that the steady decline in membership the NAACP experienced in the second half of the 1960’s was due to the NAACP’s stance on the war. But the biggest drop had occurred in 1964 before the start of the military escalation, when the group lost more than 50,000 members. In fact, there are several possible explanations for the loss of members during this period, none of them related to the NAACP’s position on the war, but as Wallace’s letter indicated very likely related to the NAACP’s close relationship with the Johnson White House. Director of Branches Gloster Current claimed that the decline in 1964 was due to the fact that NAACP community leaders had focused on “lobbying for passage of the civil rights bill and voter registration and get-out-the-vote campaigns,” essentially the White House agenda, rather than membership renewals, the NAACP’s.

An incident surrounding Current’s explanation for the continued decline in 1965 reveals the internal tensions caused by the Wilkins’ “White House insider” status. When Current suggested at a spring 1966 staff meeting that Wilkins’ close relationship with the President may have contributed to the 1965 losses, Wilkins demanded that Current either “cite chapter and verse to demonstrate that the NAACP has lost membership support among the Negro population because of my relationship (I deny any ‘closeness’) to the Johnson administration or that you apologize to me and
to the other staff members present.” Deeming Current’s assertion “gratuitously insulting” and “discourteous,” Wilkins concluded that the remarks implied “that the Negro population of the country is anti-Johnson Administration,” a charge for which Current clearly “lacked any supporting proof.” Conceding that the remark was “tactless,” and “difficult to substantiate,” Current’s terse, shrewdly-worded three-sentence reply that “all present . . . know me well enough to believe that I would never be deliberately insulting to one who is doing so much for our common cause” apologized for the remark, but refused to repudiate it.57

According to Wilkins, the decline in 1965 resulted from the mistaken belief that the movement was over, now that it had benefited from a supportive administration and groundbreaking civil rights legislation.58 But the downturn also may have been based on the perception the NAACP’s agenda seemed outdated, its leadership old and hierarchical, and its methodology staid at a time when activists had been energized by more participatory forms of protest. Or as historian Jonathan Rosenberg noted, it may have been because the civil rights activists of the mid-1960s, unlike those in the 1930s and 40s, simply had more civil rights organizations to choose from now that the movement lacked “a center of gravity.”59 Whatever the reason, despite a small increase in 1966 of 601 persons, the NAACP’s membership figures ultimately returned to the post-WWII norm of 400,000-450,000 indicating that the more than 500,000 members in 1963 was most likely an aberration created by the exposure and momentum of the March on Washington.
As with the membership figures, it is also easy to reach the facile conclusion that the symbiotic relationship between NAACP and the Johnson White House in the period before the escalation led Wilkins to silence war critics in 1965 and 1966 under pressure from the White House. But to do so fails to take into account Wilkins’ personal and professional ambitions for himself and the NAACP, his consuming jealousy of King, his narrow agenda for the civil rights movement, his anti-communist experiences in the 1930s and again in the 1950s, his reading of history, and his hero worship of Lyndon Johnson. Wilkins needed no additional prodding from the White House in his efforts to criticize or take on wayward members, chapters, convention delegates, or other “Big Six” leaders. The NAACP’s continued loyalty to the White House, despite the criticism of other liberal groups, appears to have been based on the fact that its agenda for the civil rights movement coincided with the civil rights philosophy of the Johnson White House.

The explanations for Wilkins’ personal behavior are many. First, the powerful effect of unequivocal public support from the President of the United States, especially a powerful southern president, on the leadership of a civil rights organization that had been fighting for presidential recognition since the turn of the century can scarcely be underestimated. After the Voting Rights Act address, an enraptured Wilkins admitted, “I ... never dreamed that in my lifetime a President of the United States would stand up before the world and speak as Mr. Johnson did the other night. He didn’t say ‘Boys, you know how I feel’ behind his office door. He didn’t say ‘unless’ or ‘provided that,’ or engage in any double-talk. He stood there before the people and put his role in
history on the line.” And Wilkins was not alone in his praise. The Amsterdam News (New York) printed the address in full, urging its readers to “Add it to your collection of great moments in American history.”

And Johnson provided more than just supportive words to the civil rights movement; he provided leadership. Unlike in 1957, Johnson refused to compromise when it came to the 1964 Civil Rights Act. He faced down Southern Senators holding up all other legislation until the bill passed intact. And he even pressured FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover to investigate not only civil rights leaders but also violence against civil rights activists in the South, as in the disappearance of three activists in Mississippi in the summer of 1964. As NAACP Field Secretary Charles Evers explained, “he used his own advantage… to the advantage of us that needed it.”

Because of his efforts on behalf of civil rights legislation, the leaders of the NAACP considered Lyndon Johnson one of the few presidents who had “shoved his stack of chips in the pot” on behalf of civil rights, joining an elite club of civil rights heroes to which only he and perhaps Abraham Lincoln and Harry Truman belonged.

Second, the NAACP, like the administration, was committed to the four “L’s” of legislation, lobbying, litigation, and lining up new voters. Johnson’s quest for legislation fulfilled the NAACP’s historic mission as defined by Wilkins himself, in the 1930s and the 1950s. According to Wilkins, “The whole point of the NAACP was to establish the Negro as a legal entity, with the rights and privileges of a citizen. Who did that? We did that. We are still doing that…. Judicial rights and legislative approval, that’s our continuing fight.” It was a vision of the organization to which
Wilkins dedicated himself for forty years, and with the passage of the Voting Rights Act, the companion legislation to the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the legislative phase of the movement that Wilkins himself had helped to shape reached a triumphant conclusion. As Wilkins marveled “God does move in strange and wondrous ways. It is a fact and truth that the bravest, most compassionate and effective friend the Negro in America has ever had is a southern president.”

Third, Wilkins would finally enjoy the same prestige and benefits that accompanied the role of gatekeeper to the president for the civil rights community just as Walter White had done during the Truman administration. As an ally of a powerful president Wilkins also began 1965 on a personal and professional high watching the inaugural parade from the presidential reviewing stand and, more importantly, seeing the three branches of government embrace civil rights in ways he scarcely could have imagined when he joined the NAACP in 1931. To Wilkins it seemed that in the spring and summer of 1965 the civil rights movement was at “the very apex of its powers.”

Fourth, a close association with the administration brought the NAACP leadership an exceptional degree of information, access, influence, and professional advancement through judicial and governmental service. In contrast to the disillusioned students who made up CORE and SNCC, Meier and Rudwick concluded that by the mid-1960s “the right wing of the protest movement, which included a substantial group in the NAACP…came to view its role as exercising influence within established institutions rather than fighting from outside.”
Finally, Wilkins allied himself with the White House because both he and the President believed that they could secure their place in history and their mutual legacies as “rightful” leaders of the civil rights movement through the Office of the President of the United States.  

Although John Kennedy’s status as a martyr and Robert Kennedy’s as the heir apparent would haunt him throughout his presidency, Johnson hoped that the NAACP could help him take the civil rights sheen away from the Kennedys.

In return the White House provided Wilkins with “a closed channel for immediate help on problems,” the most pressing of which for the last decade had been his rivalry with King. For example, even though they admitted that King had “really helped” during the election and that his assistance might be needed again “if demonstrations resume and things get hot,” presidential advisors Jack Valenti, Lee White, Burke Marshall, Nick Katzenbach, and Perry Barber all agreed that Vice President Hubert Humphrey, not the President, should attend the 1964 celebration honoring King for receiving the Nobel Peace Prize. Even though it would necessitate re-arranging Johnson’s schedule to provide him with a “meaningful reason for not attending,” Johnson’s presence, they concluded, would “give King the edge” and “demean Wilkins” who was “in difficulty with his own organization.”

By assisting Wilkins in his competition with King, the White House would not only elevate its choice to lead the movement, providing even more control over it, but after the summer of 1965, it would also silence the one war critic the White House feared could unite the civil rights and antiwar movements.
As the Johnson administration and long-established moderate groups like the Urban League and NAACP had moved closer in the summer and fall of 1965 in order to control the direction of the movement, other groups like SCLC, CORE and SNCC, born in the crucible of World War II activism and Democratic liberalism and fearing a loss of autonomy, sought to move further away from the White House orbit. By 1966 the leadership of SNCC and CORE began to see the Black Power movement and antiwar activism as vehicles for expressing their frustration with the apparent failure of the previous approaches to civil rights progress, particularly those that were interracial and legislative in nature, and for asserting a measure of independence from the control of white liberals and their black allies. And while the fragmentation within the civil rights movement was not new, the post-Voting Rights Act version was different. *Coups d' états* at both CORE and SCLC elevated leadership that clearly moved in a different direction, not only with respect to the war but with respect to the aims of the movement. 71 Was the goal equality or empowerment? Were whites to be part of the solution or were they just the problem? Was there a difference between segregation and voluntary exclusion?

By July 1966 the dispute was an open secret, widely reported in both the black and white press. *U.S. News and World Report* reported that this time “the split was so deep that few in the Movement bothered issuing the customary denials that it existed—or the pro forma predictions that it could ever be healed.” *Time* cited the very different annual conventions held by CORE and the NAACP in the summer of 1966. NAACP delegates spent most of the convention “responding to black power
advocates” and heard the Vice President assert that there was “no room in America for calls for racism, whether they come from a throat that is white or one that is black.” CORE delegates, on the other hand, listened to SNCC Chairman Stokely Carmichael assert that “This is not a movement being run by Lyndon Johnson.” The SCLC, the NAACP, and the Urban League all boycotted the CORE conference, only to be replaced by the Black Muslims.\textsuperscript{72} Tuesday magazine, a black newspaper supplement, noted that CORE and SNCC’s embrace of black power had “produced strange bedfellows for the civil rights movement” since as former CORE executive director James Farmer, “The Muslims are going in the opposite direction of integration, brotherhood and equality with all men.”\textsuperscript{73}

The administration was concerned about the split as well. According to political scientist Bruce Miroff, the summer of 1966 was the moment when the Johnson White House lost “control over black politics… with ‘white backlash’ menacing it from the right and ‘black power’ assailing it from the left,” and [with] the President deeply absorbed in the Vietnam War …and loathe to give his full attention to other subjects.”\textsuperscript{74} In a flurry of memos Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach and White House Aide Harry McPherson divided sharply on the best way for the White house to respond to the situation. McPherson urged the president “as the principle civil rights leader in the country” to meet with a host of civil rights leaders (except for representatives from CORE and SNCC) immediately since “the very fact that you have led the way toward first-class citizenship for the Negro, that you are identified with his cause, means that to some extent your stock rises and falls with the

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movement’s.” Katzenbach, on the other hand, argued that “one of the principal difficulties of established Negro leadership has been and will continue to be taking positions that are at the same time responsible, practical—and clearly independent of the Administration.” The only point of agreement was, wrote McPherson, that “The civil rights movement is obviously in a mess.... White resentment is great and still growing; the Negro community is fragmented.”

The split was not just between the militants and the moderates. In an issue dated the same day as SNCC’s antiwar statement, Jet had reported that “a broad gulf has developed between [M. L. King] and the NAACP and the National Urban League.” Citing King’s refusal “to become a part of the White House guard” and his involvement “in the Vietnam peace controversy” as the two main sources of conflict, Jet predicted that the NAACP would have the widest national support by the mid-term elections, but the Urban League would have the most money and King the most influence. As if confirming Jet’s assessment, White House Aide Clifford Alexander admitted that “the most difficult part of the equation” for the White House was not what John Lewis said when SNCC came out against the war in January 1966, but “what Martin Luther King will do next,” despite the fact that King had been silent on Vietnam since the previous summer.

Feeling like he simply did not “have the strength to fight” against the press, the White House, and the rest of the civil rights leadership, including his own staff and board, Martin Luther King backed away from joining the antiwar movement in 1965. Vincent Harding, a King associate, biographer and admirer, admitted that King, “was
politically advanced over many parts of his organization and saw a perspective that a lot of people simply did not see. ... King’s attempt to put [civil rights] into an international context--not to forget it, not to secondarize it, but to put it into an international context--was just more than they wanted to deal with.” 79 So until April 1966 when it finally “issued a strong, terse condemnation of the U.S. Policy in the Vietnam crisis,” citing “the immorality and tragic absurdity of the U.S. position in Vietnam,” the SCLC board did not “go along” with King’s opposition to the war in Vietnam. 80 King may have been determined not “to sit by and see war escalated without saying anything about it,” but the SCLC board members made it clear they certainly intended to. 81

While the SCLC board supported King’s right to speak out as an individual, even his most loyal allies questioned the wisdom of joining the fledgling peace movement that was clearly dominated by leftists. Andrew Young explained, “...we tended to try to keep the two movements apart because for one thing the peace movement was predominantly white. In that stage it had ...its kookie elements. ...[it] had a kind of old left and new left tinge to it, too—not that this really disturbed us. ...but in terms of our life in the South and our politics in the South, it just didn’t make sense to be linked up with all those fellows.” 82 But for SCLC, a group comprised mostly of ministers, particularly with King as a pacifist and the leader of a revolution premised on non-violent resistance at the helm, its position on the war could not remain purely a tactical issue. It was inevitably a moral one: a distinction secular
leaders like Wilkins and Young were not required to make but one the SCLC could not long avoid.

Nonetheless, the summer of 1965 marked the beginning of what DNC Deputy Chair Louis Martin referred to as the "running battle" between King and the White House over Vietnam, adding yet another dimension to the Wilkins-King rivalry. 83

According to King Aide Andrew Young,

The Democratic Party even started organizing meetings against us in the black community... They pulled together all the Negro newspaper editors... to get them to support the Administration's stand.... [W]e had to do something to counteract that. So the Johnson Administration was pulling the preachers together one week and we pulled them together a month later and would explain our side because when Dr. King was convinced about something and got to preaching on it, it was kind of hard not to go along. 84

In contrast when SCLC’s sister direct action group, CORE, sought to take a stand condemning the war in 1965 it was their leader who prevented them from doing so. King’s call for a “negotiated settlement even with the Vietcong” had landed right in the middle of CORE’s convention where the delegates spent their final session wrestling with the Vietnam question. Although Executive Director James Farmer had told delegates in his opening address that he opposed the war because it was “impossible for the Government to maintain a decisive war against poverty and bigotry in the U.S. while... pouring billions down the drain in a war against people in Viet Nam,” he refused to let CORE officially condemn the war on the grounds that to do so was both “tactically imprudent” and “out of step” with the black community. 85
Driven, perhaps in part, by his desire to maintain federal support for his fledgling literacy program, Farmer convinced delegates to table an antiwar resolution that had passed despite the abstention of the majority of the delegates. With the organization already struggling to survive financially, Farmer argued that connecting with the peace movement would divert CORE from developing a strategy to attack racial discrimination in the North, "open the door" to Communist infiltration, confuse CORE supporters and risk "losing the sympathies" of people who supported civil rights but opposed the antiwar movement. Although they disagreed about the 1963 Freedom Rides, the 1964 moratorium, affirmative action and the war, apparently James Farmer and Roy Wilkins thought a lot alike when it came to whether civil rights organizations should become involved in the antiwar movement in the summer of 1965.

At the other end of the Vietnam spectrum stood SNCC. On January 6, 1966 SNCC Chairman John Lewis accused the U.S. government of being "deceptive in its claims of concern for the freedom of the Vietnamese people, just as the government has been deceptive in claiming concern for the freedom of the colored people in . . . the Dominican Republic, the Congo, South Africa, Rhodesia and in the United States itself." Because of its failure to enforce the civil and voting rights statutes in this country, SNCC questioned "the ability and even the desire of the United States to guarantee free elections abroad." SNCC was also concerned that "16% of the draftees from this country are Negro, called on to stifle the liberation of Vietnam, to preserve a 'democracy' which does not exist for them at home." Since civil rights workers in the
United States were as likely to lose their lives as soldiers in Vietnam, SNCC expressed “sympathy and support” for draft resisters who, as a valid alternative to military service, ‘prefer to use their energy in building democratic forms at home.’\textsuperscript{88}

While the topic of SNCC’s statement was the war in Vietnam, the subject was SNCC’s disillusionment with the administration and the course of the civil rights movement.\textsuperscript{89} And it was this disillusionment that would very shortly give birth to the Black Power movement that would dominate the civil rights dialogue in 1966. In fact the severity of the conflict over the direction of the civil rights movement made the Vietnam War an even less significant issue for civil rights groups in 1966 than it had been in 1965, despite the continued escalation and SNCC’s antiwar statement. And if the antiwar sentiments expressed by SNCC in 1966 had, as this study asserts, as much, if not more, to do with the conflict over who controlled the direction of the movement then it should come as no surprise that the average African American continued to support the administration, since most African Americans were not directly involved in the civil rights movement. They had other issues to contend with on a daily basis.

In 1969 Alfred Hero, Executive Director of the World Peace Foundation, examined polling data to survey African American Opinion on U.S. foreign policy between 1937 and 1967. He found that blacks were less willing than whites to draft men for any war overseas long before the Vietnam conflict, important contextual information that is often lacking in studies that posit disproportionate opposition to the Vietnam War. Polls conducted in 1965 and 1966 indicated that while African Americans were less supportive of U.S. involvement in Vietnam than whites, they
were also less critical of it. In addition to being more likely to express no opinion at all, they also offered much higher approval ratings of the way the President was handling his duties, including the war.\textsuperscript{90} Hero concluded that the difference probably was due to more widespread Democratic preferences among African Americans.\textsuperscript{91} Hero also found that despite somewhat greater isolationism among blacks, few differences appeared between the races about the prosecution of the war after the military escalation in the mid-1960s. He wrote that “Insofar as they held opinions, Negroes and whites were about equally inclined to feel that we should have become involved with our armed forces in Southeast Asia, that it had not been a mistake to enter the actual fighting with our own combat troops, … and that we should not continue the war alone if a ‘South Vietnam government decides to end the war and stop fighting.’\textsuperscript{92} Simply put, he did not find that African Americans were disproportionately against the war.\textsuperscript{93}

It is frequently asserted that as “middle-class,” professional organizations, the NAACP and Urban League’s views on the war were not representative of most African Americans, particularly those from the lower classes. Polling data does not bear this out. Polling data from 1966 showed that the percentage of blacks supporting withdrawal, while still a definite minority, increased with income and generally reflected the national average for those supporting withdrawal, a figure that never extended beyond 20 percent between 1964 and 1968.\textsuperscript{94} In fact, a poll of “a representative group of [black] New Yorkers” conducted by the Amsterdam News (New York) in response to SNCC’s antiwar statement in January of 1966 and the

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NAACP's rebuttal favored the views of the NAACP over SNCC's. Of the thirty-one participants, twenty men and eleven women whose occupations ranged from housewife to attorney, from barber to student, from minister to phone operator, only four, two women and two men, agreed with SNCC. Although four had no opinion, refused to take sides, or gave non-responsive answers, an impressive seventy-four percent supported the NAACP position.

But the controversy surrounding SNCC's antiwar statement and revelations of disproportionate induction, re-enlistment, and casualties figures among African American soldiers made public by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings on U.S. policy in Southeast Asia, expanded the discussion of the war from civil rights groups to the broader African American community in the early spring of 1966. An editorial in the Chicago Defender explained that

While the Negro press hasn't been too articulate on the Asian issue...it would be a mistake to conclude that the Negro masses are indifferent to the course U.S. foreign policy is pursuing in Viet Nam. After all, Negro soldiers represent a substantial percentage of the U.S. combat forces in the theatre of war where Negro casualties are reported to be disproportionately high... we are interested in unfolding events and are concerned with the fate of our boys who must fight in the mud and rice paddies of South Viet Nam. For all that, we take our stand beside Uncle Sam.

Similarly, Jet magazine's Washington correspondent, Simeon Booker contended that "When leaders continue to assert that the civil rights movement has no concern in Vietnam, they show how poorly they represent 'the brother.' Reason: Some 15,000
Negro troops are fighting in Vietnam and not a leader has gone abroad to check on racial conditions at a time Negro GI’s are beginning to gripe.”100 This was a striking contrast to the year before when Booker had advised the White House to publicize the exploits of Negro war heroes “in order to counteract any feeling that [blacks] are not involved.”101 By the spring of 1966 it was clear that African Americans were “involved” to an inordinate degree. So in July 1966 Young became the only “Big Six” leader to heed Booker’s call to visit black troops in Vietnam.

But in early 1965 it had been “Big Six” leaders making the call to insure that a member of their ranks was “involved” in the Johnson administration in a new way. Roy Wilkins had alone stood with the administration as other civil rights leaders called on the President to name Whitney Young as the first black Cabinet Secretary. In a memo briefing the President for a meeting with Martin Luther King to discuss Young’s appointment, presidential advisor Lee White urged the president to tell King that any “effort to mount a campaign” only “harms the cause” and noted that he had a call to Wilkins pending.102 Apparently White’s call got through because within days Jet reported that despite the support of Farmer, King, Dorothy Height, and “scores of lawmakers and national personalities,” Wilkins refused to support any “Young-for-the-Cabinet” drive on the grounds that Negroes “should allow the President to make the choice of a qualified Negro for his Cabinet.”103 The President couldn’t have said it better himself. And as long as Wilkins was around it appeared he wouldn’t have to.

The administration’s efforts to block the Young for Cabinet campaign did not mean, however, that the President did not hold the Urban League executive director in
high esteem. In fact it had been the President himself who had sparked the initial
rumors that Young was being considered for a Cabinet post when he spoke at the
Urban League’s Community Action Assembly in December of 1964.\textsuperscript{104} According to

\textit{Jet magazine}

the impact of the speech was equally enormous…. Few
Presidents have ever addressed Negro gatherings, none in the
weeks before an Inauguration when Cabinet nominations and
legislation are to be considered. Few Presidents accorded the
League a major role in the charting of the nation’s economic
course. No former League director ever demanded the respect
and attention of resourceful and youthful Whitney Young.
Political Washington interpreted the LBJ appearance as a
broader of the orbit of high-level influence and an indication
of a new League popularity at 1600-03 Pennsylvania Ave.\textsuperscript{105}

Having rid the Urban League of its financial morass, prodded local affiliates to shed
their lethargic, conservative image, and befriended and won the respect of a powerful
president, Whitney Young was now a major player on the civil rights scene. And his
influence on the President was at its peak in the summer of 1965. When Wilkins
described the movement as being at the very apex of its power in the summer of 1965
he could have been describing Whitney Young.

The best and clearest evidence of Young’s influence on the President and his
success in shaping the language and logic of the Great Society was Johnson’s Howard
University commencement address in June 1965.\textsuperscript{106} In addition to Urban League
claims that Johnson speechwriters had consulted Young’s 1964 book, \textit{To Be Equal},
during its drafting, Vice President Hubert Humphrey confirmed that Johnson had
“borrowed a figure of speech from Whitney Young, Jr.” for one of the speech’s most
celebrated passages. It stated “You do not take a person who, for years, has been
hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him to the starting line of a race and then say, ‘you are free to compete with all the others’ and still justly believe that you have been completely fair... This is the next and more profound stage of the battle for civil rights. ... not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result.’

But the speech is also important for understanding African American support for Johnson despite the war. In the weeks leading up to the speech the President told Roy Wilkins that he was “ready for an all-fronts assault on the problems of race.... it would not be enough to open the door of opportunity.... After three hundred years of slavery and enforced second-class citizenship, he believed that the victims had to be helped through the door and on their way.” Wilkins concluded “...I came away...feeling that he was not only with us but often ahead of us.” That may well have been true for liberals like Wilkins who did not believe in affirmative action, but Johnson was right in step with Young who had long been on record as an advocate of “compensatory action” through his Domestic Marshall Plan.

But in proposing a plan of affirmative action in the Howard University speech, Johnson moved beyond the liberal consensus by linking poverty and race. By listening to Young, Johnson made the error of blurring the distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor, i.e. whites versus blacks. As a rule, white Americans do not believe in group privilege despite the fact that they themselves enjoy it and this was especially true in an era when middle-class, suburban whites had less contact than ever before with their poorer brethren, white or black.
distinction between helping the poor and helping blacks had not been lost on Johnson’s hero Franklin Roosevelt who used it to maintain the fragile Democratic coalition that propelled him into the Oval Office four times. Nonetheless, after the Howard University speech many African Americans began to believe that much of the political backlash, hatred, and anti-war criticism that defined the rest of Johnson’s presidency was merely a convenient discursive cover for pseudo-liberals who thought Johnson was going too far to help black people. On this basis and in recognition of the political price he paid for attempting to help them, he had earned their continued support.

Young was among those who always gave the President his due for championing civil rights, but he also adhered to White House Aide Cliff Alexander’s admonition that civil rights leaders with a special relationship to the president were obligated to move the “man along.” Young never stopped pushing the administration to fund fully the War on Poverty even though he lost more battles than he won after the Howard University speech. Young realized that only the federal government possessed the massive resources necessary to eradicate poverty and achieve full employment. He also realized that as a civil rights leader he was not in a position to alter U.S. policy on the war. Therefore as the U.S. commitment in Southeast Asia escalated, the ever-pragmatic Young began searching for ways to have the federal resources allocated to the war in Vietnam find their way into the War on Poverty as a means of furthering the Urban League mission of equal opportunity,
training, and full employment. Young’s support for the Johnson administration policies in Southeast Asia was both the product and the result of this search.

Whitney Young had been conspicuously absent from the debate over the war and the movement in July 1965, but he made sure that the Urban League’s position got on record during their annual convention in August. Although it was highly unlikely that the League, given that Vice President Humphrey was the convention’s featured speaker, would take an antiwar stance, in discussing the proposed resolution reaffirming the Urban League’s role in International Affairs, a Pittsburgh delegate wondered if the reaffirmation was really necessary at all and if the timing of it would “be considered a slap at other civil rights leaders.” Acknowledging that the delegate had raised a “good point,” Young explained that the Vietnam War was currently a hot topic in the press because King and Wilkins had split on the issue and that as the Urban League’s representative he was frequently asked about its position on the war. Young felt “that to say nothing would be misunderstood” since he was the only civil rights leader yet to go on record and reporters assumed that a statement would come out of their convention as well.\textsuperscript{115}

If the Urban League delegate from Pittsburgh had been concerned that the Urban League statement appeared to be a repudiation of King, he needed to look no further than the resolution of King’s own organization to find solace. When placed side-by-side the 1965 “Vietnam” resolutions of the SCLC and the Urban League are remarkably similar. The SCLC resolution read in part:

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We must still affirm that the primary function of our organization is to secure full citizenship rights for the Negro citizens of this country... Our resources are not sufficient to assume the burden of two major issues... we would therefore urge that the efforts of SCLC in mass demonstrations and action movements be confined to the question of racial brotherhood.\textsuperscript{116}

The Urban League Resolution stated:

Whereas, the National Urban League is wholly absorbed in its role of seeking to resolve the domestic problems that led to its founding in the first place; ... the National Urban League reaffirms its commitment to its historic task; that it not divide nor divert its energies and resources by seeking to merge domestic and international issues... that it can best serve the ... goals of our country by continuing to seek to make real the American dream of bringing true justice and equal opportunity to all American citizens.\textsuperscript{117}

Recognizing that the reaffirmation essentially stated that the Urban League would remain silent on international issues, Young struggled, with some difficulty, to distinguish the League’s stand on Vietnam from its continuing interest in issues related to the treatment of blacks in South Africa. After momentarily pondering whether the resolution “would seem to imply we should say nothing about the situation in South Africa,” Young found the distinction he needed in the fact that the Vietnam War, unlike apartheid in South Africa, was an “armed conflict.” He proposed repeating the phrase in the last paragraph to emphasize the difference and the resolution, along with Young’s amendment, passed without further discussion.\textsuperscript{118}

All in all the 1965 civil rights convention season had ended with a clear rejection of King and a clear vindication of Wilkins’ “separate issues” doctrine that to address the war would be both a diversion and a tactical error. And it was also an indication that, at least for the time being, most civil rights organizations were not
willing to risk the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for progress presented by a sympathetic Congress, a supportive Supreme Court, and a pro-civil rights and powerful White House. So at least throughout 1965 there was a general consensus on the civil rights golden rule “[to] never . . . risk a consensus for racial equality by playing with foreign policy fire.”¹¹⁹ For African Americans and the African American leadership civil rights progress was still the primary issue of concern despite the fact that there would be less and less of a consensus about how to achieve it in the post-Voting Rights Act era.

Like the NAACP the Urban League sought to work with and through the administration. Young had fought unsuccessfully to save the PCEO and with it the Vice President’s role in civil rights enforcement when President Johnson summarily disbanded the committee the day after the “displeasure cruise” in September 1965.¹²⁰ In the spring of 1966 he had tried to convince the President to promise civil rights leaders that he would “fight any cutbacks in funds for the War on Poverty” but to no avail.¹²¹ When the billion dollars allocated to the war on poverty in 1965 (which Young characterized at the time as “a peashooter to bring down an elephant,”) was cut in half in 1966 as the budget for the department of defense grew, it was clear to Young that the vaunted “War on Poverty” had been downgraded to “barely a skirmish.”¹²² Newsweek reported that “The poverty war in the summer of its touted maturity had turned into the will-o’-the-wisp of American politics” and quoted one member of “a riot-conscious, blue-ribbon conclave” as saying “You’re going to start hearing that we
ought to be spending as much on the poverty effort as we are on the war in Vietnam.” Of course that’s exactly what Young had been calling for all along.

Though Young had been gratified that elements of his “domestic Marshall Plan, … was coming into being,” as early as January of 1965 he had also begun to warn that “the remedies proposed have been far short of the needs. Much more must be done,” he urged, “and soon.” After pressing the administration based on the Cold War argument in 1965, Young mounted a slightly different campaign after the disproportionate enlistment and casualty figures among African Americans were made public by the Fulbright hearings in the winter of 1966. Given that blacks were, once again, assuming the burdens of war, despite a history of discrimination, humiliation, and segregation in which they sometimes had to fight to have the opportunity to fight, Young called on the government to expand its commitment to the War on Poverty and Great Society initiatives as just recompense for their sacrifice. While Young and Farmer deemed the billion dollar allocation to the War on Poverty “puny compared with the need and insignificant compared with the resources expended in wars,” Wilkins called on the NAACP membership to mobilize in support of what the administration proposed and labeled critics “ultra-extremists.” But in light of the need and the administration’s faltering resolve perhaps it was time for “extreme” measures.

Launched as the Pentagon’s “contribution to the War on Poverty” Project One Hundred Thousand “was the instrument of recruitment between October 1966 and June 1969 for 246,000 “New Standards Men.” Men previously unable to qualify for
military service were recruited to unskilled job categories in the army, though they were given no remedial education. Of the first quarter million recruits, 41 per cent were nonwhites, most of them poor and poorly educated. “Because they lacked the skills to enter specialist units, 40 percent of the New Standards men found themselves in combat units, and in the Army and Marines 50 percent of the New Standards Men went to Vietnam.” Later diplomatic historian Brenda Gayle concluded that “Only the most charitable observers viewed the Project as more than a means of acquiring warm bodies for the frontlines.”

But the black media had not been in a charitable mood. The Pittsburgh Courier introduced “Project 100,000” by announcing that despite the disproportionate number of blacks already serving and dying in Vietnam, “there’s going to be even a greater percentage of Negroes drafted or enlisted in the future.” Simeon Booker wrote in Jet “Stokely Carmichael’s contention that Negro GI’s are mercenaries in Vietnam took real meaning when the Pentagon announced enrollment of 40,000 rejectees. Many will be Negro. The U.S. would rather enlist Negroes in the military and scrap the Job Corps program, with whites being deferred to stay in school. Negro youth, many high school dropouts and others with no cash to attend college, face military enlistment and service in Vietnam”

Ironically the hated program may have originated with the president’s black advisors. In the fall of 1965 both DNC Deputy Chair Louis Martin and presidential aide Hobart Taylor urged the White House to develop a program that would relax selective service admission standards to “accommodate Negroes who fail the military
test.” Both men envisioned a mutually beneficial relationship. Taylor believed that “Although these young men would cost us more than those we take at present they might cost less than they would it they remain on the streets, and the machinery is already set up to carry out this plan.” Martin concurred, writing that “A large number of these rejectees are undoubtedly in the army of unemployed Negro males…. through the efforts of an intelligent remedial and rehabilitating program [it] would appear that we could help the military in their manpower problem and ease the Negroes unemployment situation. It is even possible that this would affect the crime situation.” The next day Joe Califano forwarded Martin’s memo to Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara.  

In the fall of 1966 former Assistant Secretary of Labor Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Whitney Young joined Martin and Taylor in asserting that military service might in fact provide a solution to the employment crisis for “unemployable,” poorly educated black men. Moynihan wrote in *The New Republic* that with the recent disclosure that 67.5 percent of Negroes were failing the Selective Service mental test, the American armed forces, having become an immensely potent instrument for education and occupational mobility, have been systemically excluding the least educated, least mobile young men… as employment pure and simple, the armed forces have much to offer men with the limited current options of, say, Southern Negroes…. History may record that the single most important psychological event in race relations in the 1960’s was the appearance of Negro fighting men on the TV screens of the nation. Acquiring a reputation for military valor is one of the oldest known routes to social equality…Civil rights as an issue is fading. The poverty program is heading for dismemberment and decline. Expectations of what can be done in America are receding. Very possibly our best hope is
seriously to use the armed forces as a socializing experience for
the poor—particularly the Southern poor—until somehow their
environment begins turning out equal citizens.\textsuperscript{131}

Moynihan’s ideas were not new; President Johnson himself had linked military service
to civil rights progress during World War II when he contended that after serving in
the military blacks would no longer accept the abusive treatment meted out by whites.
From that point forward progress on the issue was the only way to avoid “blood in the
streets.” And in the summer of 1963 he had urged Ted Sorenson to have President
Kennedy “be on all the TV networks... the honor guard there with a few Negroes in it.
Then let him reach over and point and say, ‘I have to order these boys into battle, in
the foxholes carrying the flag. I don’t ask them what their name is, whether it’s Gomez
or Smith, or what color they got, what religion. If I can order them into battle I’ve got
to make it possible for them to eat and sleep in this country.”\textsuperscript{132}

While he considered it “sad” that the military must be used to address
substandard education in the black community, Young defended Project 100,000 as a
way to give a hand up to young men who are “below the national average due to the
various handicaps poverty inflicts on its sufferers. We can’t simply say,” Young
wrote, “that these men should be denied a new start in life.” Like many African
Americans of the day, especially those who had served in World War II, Young had a
positive view of military service despite having served in a segregated unit. While
serving in World War II Young had found his career in race relations. The GI bill
financed the graduate degree he needed to pursue his interest after the war. Like other
future civil rights role models and leaders like Jackie Robinson, James Meredith, and
Medgar Evers, Young developed leadership skills while serving in the military. In fact, Alfred Hero concluded in a 1969 analysis of black Americans and U.S. foreign policy that “Contrary to the utterances of some of the leaders on the left of the civil rights movement in the mid-1960s, the military and military service have had a least as favorable an image among Negroes as among whites.”

Acknowledging the controversy over the war itself and the overrepresentation of African Americans, Young contended that the plan “shouldn’t be dismissed so lightly [since] in a real sense it could serve as the basis for real changes for the better in the economic and social status of Negro citizens.” Young considered Project 100,000 a “temporary measure pending a thorough overhaul of selective service.” And he also assumed that the promised educational components of the program would in fact be realized, which they were not. Young bitterly took note of the fact that “funds needed for programs like these probably have a better chance of being voted by Congress when the Army asks for them [since] recent history has shown that Congress’ attitude is often one of extreme generosity to Pentagon requests while other agencies have to grovel for every dollar.” Ultimately, the ever-pragmatic Young concluded, “We cannot wait for Utopia to arrive. To do so is to condemn another generation of Negro youth to poverty and squalor.”

Young’s 1966 trip to Vietnam was another example of the way in which his support for the war was an attempt to use the conflict to further the goals of the Urban League for increased opportunities for blacks. Young merely tied these goals to the war effort when it became clear by 1966 that his efforts to intensify the War on
Poverty were failing. Like Wilkins, Young believed that his association with the Johnson administration could assist him in achieving his personal goals as well as those of his organization. But unlike Wilkins, Young's assessment of the administration was not obscured by personal and professional jealousies, awe of the power of the presidency, or allegiances to outdated methodologies.\textsuperscript{137} As a savvy pragmatist who believed that "you compromise on issues but principles are never compromised," Young always maintained that "building the house of democracy require[d] a diversity of methods, a variety of approaches." Flexibility was essential for success.\textsuperscript{138} The trip to Vietnam would yield a small victory and one Young could relish at a time when the president and the rest of the federal government turned more and more of their attention to the Vietnam War and away from the War on Poverty.

Although the federal government did provide access to military installations and personnel and protection, Young emphasized that his four-day trip to Vietnam was "independently conceived, organized, and financed by the Urban League" and purely for League purposes.\textsuperscript{139} His goals were to monitor the condition of black military personnel, to demonstrate the League's concern for the men who were there and to develop Urban League programs to "assure a smooth transfer from military to civilian life" for returning black veterans based on "their aspirations, their skills, their career plans."\textsuperscript{140} Despite a bit of consternation at the amount of voluntary segregation that existed during off-duty hours, Young was impressed by the interracial cooperation of the troops in Vietnam deeming it "a drastic improvement over anything experienced in
any other war.” He told reporters he hoped that the progress would “not be just a phenomenon of war and conflict,” but also continue in civilian life.141

The White House seized upon Young’s positive assessment as an unexpected opportunity to counteract liberal criticism of the war.142 Although Young had emphasized that his trip was “strictly apolitical,” U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam Henry Cabot Lodge “strongly” recommended that the President and Acting Secretary of Defense Cyrus Vance meet with Young upon his return “Young’s warts-and-all but on the whole positive presentation,” he observed, “appeared to make favorable impression on Saigon’s hard-boiled press corps.” The meeting, Lodge concluded, would be a “suitable capstone to [a]…constructive and useful trip.”143

It had been a “constructive and useful trip” for the Urban League because Young intended to use his newfound credibility on Vietnam to address a few pressing concerns. Since “businessmen, industrialists and the Federal Government had already shown interest” in the new GI re-adjustment program the Urban League was developing, Young used the meeting with the President to pursue another issue: his concerns about the lack of African American representation in the officer ranks.144 Clifford Alexander remembered that

Whitney’s line to him, which was splendid, [was] ‘B.O. Davis, Sr. was a general; his son B.O. Davis, Jr. was a general. Now, unfortunately, B.O. Davis, Jr. doesn’t have any sons, so it looks like there aren’t going to be any black generals unless you reach out and find one.’ So that got Johnson into the business of dealing with the Joint Chiefs on that. It jarred the President… you get a man of Whitney’s stature… coming back from a mission, it took on some importance.145
Unlike the unwavering, seemingly unending support Wilkins provided to the Johnson administration which made his support for the war seem like just another note in an unmodulated hymn of public adoration, Young’s constant and public attempts to push the administration forward on civil rights provided a measure of distance and the perception of independence that the relationship between Wilkins and Johnson lacked, protecting the Urban League from much of the criticism leveled at the NAACP. If the administration is viewed as orchestrating the symphony of African American support for its policies in Southeast Asia, Wilkins’ support can be seen as a constant, steady drumbeat, while Young’s functioned as a jazz riff spontaneously weaving his own interpretation throughout the melody dictated by the administration. Both played important roles, but in vastly different ways.
ENDNOTES

1 Memo from George Reedy to LBJ, 11/29/1963, Diary Backup, Box 1, Appointment File, LBJL.


3 Roy Wilkins, Standing Fast, 307.

4 Memo from Hobart Taylor to LBJ, August 30, 1965, WHCF, Box 6, Folder: BE4 2/26/65-7/6/66, LBJL.


7 Momentarily thrown by the brutality at Selma and the indecisive and tardy response from the federal government, Wilkins uttered his first and last criticism of the Johnson administration, exclaiming to reporters, “Dammit, they can send somebody to Alabama and defend the government right here.” But he quickly righted himself even before the Voting Rights Act address contending that Johnson shouldn’t be criticized for not “going to Selma and fighting with his bare hands.” Johnson’s words were enough: “He has not remained silent. His stand on voting rights is clear. His outrage over Selma is evident in his sending his emissaries to Alabama along with the attorney general and the FBI. That’s what he has an administration for.” Farnsworth Fowl, “NAACP Urges Troops in Selma,” New York Times, 9 March 1965, 23. Kenneth O’Reilly, Black Americans: The FBI Files (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc.), 438.


14 Wolk, *The Presidency*, 187, note 35, 75 note 27; In January *Jet* had described Clarence Mitchell as “perhaps the Negro civil righter closest to both LBJ and Vice President Hubert Humphrey, after almost a quarter century of work on Capitol Hill.” “First Negro in Cabinet Hint Spurs Comment from Wilkins.” *Jet*, 21 January 1965, 6-7. President Johnson disbanded the PCEO and next day.

15 Memo from Lee C. White to LBJ, November 2, 1965, WHCF, Box 22, Folder: “HU2/MC 11/22/63-11/15/65,” LBJL. Despite their success in controlling the agenda of the White House Conference, the White House won the battle and lost the war. James Farmer described the Conference as an attempt to tell people to be quiet, and cut out this nonsense.” Farmer, Oral History, LBJL, Tape 2, 19.


18 Other NAACP leaders like Mississippi Field Secretary Charles Evers, Thurgood Marshall, Clarence Mitchell were also loyal if less obsequious Johnson supporters. See Charles Evers, Thurgood Marshall, Clarence Mitchell oral histories at the LBJ Library.

19 For more on Wilkins troubling relationship with the FBI see David J. Garrow, “FBI Harassment and FBI Historiography: Analyzing Informants and Measuring the Effects,” *The Public Historian* 10 (Fall 1988), 12 and Kenneth O’Reilly, *Black Americans, the FBI Files* (New York: Carrol and Graf Publishers, Inc., 1994), 424-443; Within days of assuming office White House Press Secretary George Reedy concluded that Wilkins should be the Negro leader since King lacked Wilkins’ “judgment and sense of fair play.” Memo from George Reedy to LBJ, 11/29/1963, Diary Backup, Box 1, Appointment File, LBJL. Wilkins was also the FBI choice to replace King. See Kenneth O’Reilly, *Racial Matters, the FBI’s Secret File on Black America, 1960-1972* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1989), 141-2.

20 President Johnson’s thank you note to Minnie Wilkins, who had written to commend him on his 1965 Howard University speech, included the fact that her husband had been consulted prior to the speech and a handwritten postscript that her husband was “a tower of strength to me.” Letter from LBJ to Mrs. Roy Wilkins, July 31, 1965, Roy Wilkins Papers, Box 7, General Correspondence Files 1965, LOC.

21 Letter from Johnson to Wilkins, January 17, 1969, Name Files, Roy Wilkins (NAACP), LBJL. Johnson biographer Doris Kearns Goodwin used Johnson’s correspondence with Wilkins to illustrate how Johnson’s salutations reflected the progress of his relationship with the recipient: “Over time... if the alliance prospered, the original form of signing—"To Roy Wilkins, from Lyndon Johnson"—would give way to "Dear Roy, My best, Lyndon"; within a couple of years "Roy" was addressed as "My Esteemed Friend" and two years later "Lyndon" became "Your friend and admirer, Lyndon." Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson*, 181.

22 Letter to Lee White from Roy Wilkins, September 8, 1965, NAACP Papers, Part VI, Box A23, Administrative File, General Office Files, Government Federal, Johnson, Lyndon B., LOC.

23 Even Johnson, who set very high standards for loyalty, noted that Wilkins never failed to meet them. In a note of thanks to Wilkins the President wrote “You have always a man whom I could depend, regardless of change.” Wilkins served the President’s interests so loyally on so many occasions that
even Johnson advised Wilkins to call him “a sonofabitch” in order to retain the veneer of independence and credibility—an offer Wilkins rejected with amusement and righteous indignation. Letter from LBJ to Wilkins, February 24, 1966, WHCF, Box 23, Folder: TR 80, LBJS; Wilkins, Standing Fast, 329-30; Louis Martin, Oral History, LBJS, 32.

24 Political scientist Bruce Miroff found that the pattern of phone calls between Wilkins and the White House prior to the moratorium strongly indicated that he was working on their behalf. Miroff, “Presidential Leverage.” 13. Roy Wilkins, “What Now—One Negro Leader’s Answer,” New York Times Magazine, August 16, 1964, 11-18; Memo from Lee C. White to LBJ, August 19, 1964, Diary Backup, Box 8, Folder: Appointment File [Diary Backup] 8/19/64, LBJS.


26 Journalist Martin Arnold concluded that beginning in 1960 the NAACP “functioned more or less as an arm of the Democratic Party.” This tendency became so pronounced in the Johnson years that Kenneth Clark publicly warned Wilkins about the dangers of becoming “vulnerable to the shrewd, psychological exploitation of skillful political leaders” in his quest to maintain a “posture of respectability.” And by Wilkins’ own admission there was no politician more shrewd or skillful than Lyndon Johnson. Arnold, “There is No Rest,” 41. Clark, “The Civil Rights Movement,” 250; Wilkins, Standing Fast, 276; Audiotranscripts of phone conversation between LBJ and Wilkins, 8/15/64, 9:50 a.m., LBJS.

27 Memo to LBJ from Jack Valenti, January 22, 1965, WHCF, Box 102, Folder: "FG 11-8-1/ O'Brien, Lawrence F. 11/23/63-", LBJS.

28 Memo from Lee C. White to LBJ, August 19, 1964, Diary Backup, Box 8, Folder: Appointment File [Diary Backup] 8/19/64, LBJS; Letter from Mickey Polan to Walter Jenkins, August 19, 1964, WHCF, Box 11, Folder: HU2 8/19/64-8/31/64, LBJS. Interestingly CORE executive director James Farmer gave two different accounts of Wilkins involvement. In 1971 Farmer contended that while Wilkins and Rustin did not say so directly “the implication was very clear in what they did say, that [the moratorium] was at the President’s request.” But in 1965, perhaps in the hopes of mending their deteriorating relationship with LBJ, Farmer told Robert Penn Warren that he was unaware that the President had made any such request, and that he had seen no verification of the “claims made that Johnson had asked for a moratorium.” James Farmer, Oral History, LBJS, Tape 2, 2; Warren, Who Speaks? 421.


34 Roy Wilkins column, September 25-26, 1965, Roy Wilkins Papers, Box 43, Speech and Writings File, Folder: “R&T Syndicate Newspaper Column, MSS 1965 July-December,” LOC.


36 Roy Wilkins, “SNCC’s Foreign Policy,” January 16, 1966, RWP, S&WF, Box 39, Folder: RT&S Newspaper Column Clippings 1966, LOC: Alexander suggested having the six black congressmen issue a statement “expressing the wholehearted support of the Negro people for our actions in Vietnam” since “elected officials would be in a far better position to call themselves representatives of the Negro people than John Lewis.” Memo from Clifford Alexander to LBJ, January 7, 1966, WHCF, Box 148, Folder: ND 12/2/65-11/21/66, LBJL.

37 Negative effects included “reduced income loss of some supporters, the consequences of reflecting a concern that obviously is not the major priority of the victims of discrimination who feel more immediate urgencies.” Memo from Enid Baird to Roy Wilkins, March 30, 1966, and attached minutes from the Council for United Civil Rights Leadership meeting on March 23, 1966, Roy Wilkins Papers, Box 7, General Correspondence Files, 1966, LOC.

38 For example, many of the concerns had been raised by James Farmer the previous summer and Young’s views which eventually became resolutions at the 1966 Urban League convention, are reflected in the minutes. Memo from Enid Baird to Roy Wilkins, March 30, 1966, and attached minutes from the Council for United Civil Rights Leadership meeting on March 23, 1966, Roy Wilkins Papers, Box 7, General Correspondence Files, 1966, LOC.

39 It should be noted that no representative from SNCC was present at the meeting. And neither CORE nor SCLC had yet issued official antiwar statements, despite the personal opposition of their leaders.

40 Memo from Enid Baird to Roy Wilkins, March 30, 1966, and attached minutes from the Council for United Civil Rights Leadership meeting on March 23, 1966, Roy Wilkins Papers, Box 7, General Correspondence Files, 1966, LOC; While it is not known whether the SCLC provided CUCRL members advance copies, within weeks of the meeting the SCLC issued a terse statement condemning the war as immoral.

41 Draft memo from Executive Director Roy Wilkins to Branch, State Conference, Youth Council and College Chapter Presidents, no date, NAACP Papers, GOF, Box A328, NAACP Administration, 1956-

42 The Mississippi Freedom Summer initiatives occurred in the summers of 1964 and 1965 when SNCC encouraged northern white college students to come south to prepare rural blacks to register to vote. Press Release, August 10, 1965, NAACP Papers, GOF, Group III, Box A328, NAACP Administration, 1956-1965, Folder: Vietnam War 1964-65 File, LOC.

43 Memo from Hobart Taylor to LBJ, August 30, 1965, WHCF, Box 6, Folder: BE4 2/26/65-7/6/66, LBJL.


47 Memo from Director Branches and Field Administration Gloster Current, April 22, 1965, NAACP Papers, Box A328, NAACP Administration, 1956-1965, Folder: "General Office File Vietnam War 1964-65," LOC. The 1950 annual convention of the NAACP in Boston, MA adopted two resolutions on anti-communism. The first called for the creation of a committee to investigate communism within the leadership and membership of the local branches. The second empowered the Board of Directors to “suspend and reorganize or lift the charter and expel any branch, which, in the judgment of the Board of Directors...comes under Communist or other political control and domination.” Resolutions Adopted by the forty-first annual convention of the NAACP, Boston, MA—July 23, 1950, NAACP Papers. Part I, Reel 12, frames, 939-40. Memo from Current to Wilkins, Morsell, Mitchell, and Moon, May 14, 1965, NAACP Papers, Group III, Box A20, Folder, NAACP Administration 1956-1965, Annual Conference File 1965 Resolution, LOC.


52 Letter to Mrs. Lucille Black, NAACP Membership Secretary, from Henry Wallace, December 1, 1965, NAACP Papers General Office Files (hereafter GOF), Administration, Group IV, Box A86, Folder: Vietnam War Correspondence (hereafter VWC), LOC.

53 Even Johnson commented on Wilkins loyalty. In a note of thanks to Wilkins the President wrote “You have always a man whom I could depend, regardless of change.” Letter from LBJ to Wilkins, February 24, 1966, WHCF, Box 23, Folder: TR 80, LBJL.
54 The National Office of the NAACP received one letter about the war in 1965, nine in 1966, sixty-four, in 1967 and two in 1968.

55 Letter from Judith W. Alexander to Roy Wilkins, January 31, 1966, RWP, S&WF, Box 40, Folder: R&TS Newspaper Column Correspondence, Public Mail 1965, LOC.

56 Letter from Henry Wallace to Roy Wilkins, January 13, 1966, NAACP Papers GOF, Administration, Group IV, Box A86, Folder: VWC, 1966-69, LOC.

57 Memos to and from Branch Director Gloster Current and Roy Wilkins, March 3, 1966, RWP, General Correspondence, 1966, Box 7, LOC.


59 Booker, Black Man's America, 39; Rosenberg, “How Far,” 555.


61 According to NAACP lobbyist Clarence Mitchell: “[In]... a conversation with a Southern Senator... he told me that the President had put so much pressure on everybody that there wasn’t any doubt about this bill going through. And at the time he told me he seemed almost to be feeling the pain of the pressure... he didn’t actually vote for the bill but he could have hurt us in a lot of ways... but I think he was really convinced on the basis of whatever the President had told him or had done that this was important.” For more on Johnson’s personal lobbying efforts on behalf of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 see Califano, The Triumph & Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson, 54; And Johnson didn’t stop once the bill was passed. Columnist James Reston reported that all Johnson’s “understanding and knowledge of the South is now being brought to bear in a torrent of personal and telephone conversations with Southern leaders with the single purpose of urging compliance.” New York Times, 19 June 1964.


64 Sitkoff, A New Deal for Blacks, ch. 9; Clark, “The Civil Rights Movement,” 249; Meier and Bracey, “The NAACP as a Reform Movement,” 4, 6, 14-5; Arnold, “There is No Rest,” 45, 47; Jack Valenti, A Very Human President (New York: W.W. Norton, Inc., 1975), 395.

65 Wilkins, Standing Fast, 307, 311.

66 Meier & Rudwick, CORE, 374-75.

67 Bruce Miroff, “Presidential Leverage over Social Movements: the Johnson White House and Civil Rights,” Journal of Politics 43 (February 1981), 9. James Farmer said, “I think in the period between November ‘63... until early ‘65 Johnson’s record on civil rights was excellent -- the best of any President so far. There’s just no question about that at all. ... I have grave questions that Kennedy could
have gotten the civil rights act through intact. But Johnson did, and he fought to get it through... he wanted to go down in history as a person who really accomplished something in civil rights for blacks and that would secure his place in history. James Farmer, Oral History, LBWL, Tape 2, 26.

68 For more on Johnson's feelings of inadequacy and paranoia regarding the Kennedys see Goodwin, Lyndon Johnson, 162-67, 199-202; Blenna Steinberg, Shame and Humiliation: presidential decisionmaking on Vietnam: a psychoanalytical interpretation (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996), 63-74; and Dallek, Flawed Giant, 7, 49. For Johnson's well-documented "irrational bitterness" and paranoia toward Robert Kennedy is well-documented. See Jeff Shesol, Mutual Contempt: Lyndon Johnson, Robert Kennedy, and the Feud That Defined a Decade (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997); Schlesinger, Robert Kennedy and his Times, 671-4.

69 Simeon Booker, "The TenNegroes Closest to LBJ," Jet, September 3, 1964, 18; During his brief stint as program director for the NAACP between 1959 and 1961, James Farmer discovered that a large number of the staff meetings "were about King—how to respond to him and how to deal with him." Farmer, Lay Bare the Heart, 216.

70 Valenti also reasoned that the "FBI reports on King [were] ticking away—and if [they were] ever brought into [the] open, [the] President would have honored him knowing what the reports say." Memos from Jack Valenti to LBJ. November 13, 1964, WHCF, Box 19, Folder IV/1964/ST 32 NYC 6/15/64 - 11/19/64, LBWL.

71 According to Winifred Breines 1965 was the "crucial year" when SNCC "experience the centrifugal pull away from original members and visions." Winifred Breines, "Whose New Left? Journal of American History 75 (September 1988), 529.

72 In June Young had received a letter from Elijah Muhammad proposing a meeting of McKissick, Carmichael, King, Wilkins, Young and himself "to discuss the future plans and programs needed to achieve" their common goal of "freedom, justice and equality from the common enemy." Muhammad reassured Young that the meeting would "not be public" and requested an answer "within ten days." With a copy of Wilkins' response in hand, a bitter attack on SNCC enumerating the contentious relationship between the two groups, Young declined citing his fear that no "constructive purpose" would be served by such a meeting in light of "the present, well-publicized schism between some of the persons listed as simultaneous addresses." Young held out the possibility that "with the passage of time," the "fever pitch" of the feud would "abate to the point that some constructive discussions may be had." But until then Young could only thank Muhammad for his "kind invitation." Letters to and from Elijah Muhammad and Whitney Young, letter from Roy Wilkins to Elijah Muhammad, all from National Urban League Papers, Part III, Box 406, Folder: Number 7, Young, Whitney M. Jr., June 12, 1966 (2 of 3), LOC. Also see "The Convention," Memo from Washington column, Tuesday, August 1966, 2, 22.


75 Memo from Harry McPherson to LBJ, September 12, 1966; Memo from Harry McPherson to Nicholas Katzenbach, September 13, 1966; Memo from Nicholas Katzenbach to Harry McPherson, September 17, 1966; Memo from Harry McPherson to Nicholas Katzenbach, September 20, 1966.

Memo from Clifford Alexander to LBJ, January 7, 1966, WHCF, Box 148, Folder: ND 12/2/65-11/21/66, LBJL.


Vincent Harding quoted in Hampton and Fraser, *Voices of Freedom*, 337.


Andrew Young, Oral History, LBJL, 14-15. For more on the evolution of King’s decision to join the antiwar movement see Adam Fairclough, “Martin Luther King, Jr. and the War in Vietnam,” *Phylon* 45 (1984): 19-39. As King associate, biographer, and admirer Vincent Harding explained “...one of the major traditional statements by black people on anything that comes on the level of criticizing the government, about the danger of being considered a communist, is ‘It’s bad enough being black without being red, too.’ So, that’s the kind of thing that people were obviously concerned about....” Vincent Harding quoted in Hampton and Fraser, *Voices of Freedom*, 337.

Louis Martin, Oral History, LBJL, Tape 1, 31; Andrew Young, Oral History, LBJL, 16.

Andrew Young, Oral History, LBJL, 16. DNC Deputy Chair Louis Martin, a former newspaper man, suggested that the White House arrange for the President to speak to the National Newspaper Publishers Association, whose members would then “sell their people on using the new tools we’re giving them—education, poverty program, civil rights act”—and “get the Negroes solidly behind us on Viet Nam.” Note from Perry Barber to Jack Valenti, August 31, 1965, Name Files, National, N, LBJL. At least one publisher was convinced. In 1966 Carl Murphy, chairman of the board of directors of the Afro-American newspapers wrote the President “Our people support you. They want you to stand up to those dissidents who use the Congress as a sounding board to comfort our enemies abroad and encourage those at home anxious for peace without honor and without sacrifice. Carry on, Mr. President.” In his response the President assured Murphy that his actions in Southeast Asia were “the result of the commitments and the most serious kind of study by three Presidents” and that he was endeavoring to keep the people informed, “as clearly as I know how why we are there, why we must stay there, and how hard we try for a just and honorable peace.” Telegram from Carl Murphy to LBJ, February 26, 1966, WHCF, Box 178, Folder: SP 3-120/PRO-CON/A-Z, LBJL; Letter from LBJ to Carl Murphy, March 2, 1966, WHCF, Box 178, Folder: SP 3-120/PRO-CON/A-Z, LBJL.


87 Farmer, *Lay Bare the Heart*, 13; 221-2;


90 In response to the statement “In light of developments U.S. should have become involved with military forces in S.E. Asia,” 45% of blacks and 53% of whites agreed; 20% blacks and 27% of whites disagreed and 35% of blacks and 20% of whites had no opinion. Alfred O. Hero, Jr., “American Negroes and U.S. Foreign Policy: 1937-1967,” *Conflict Resolution* 13 (June 1969), 250; “Gallup Poll Claims 88% of All Negroes Like LBJ,” *Jet*, September 23, 1965, 7; A 1966 *Newsweek* survey reported that “54 per cent approve of the way President Johnson is handling the war.” “The Great Society—in Uniform,” *Newsweek*, August 22, 1966, 46; Another *Newsweek* poll found that only 35 percent of blacks disapproved of the war. Plummer, “Evolution,” 77.

91 Hero, “American Negroes,” 251, 231. Allan Kornberg, Elliot L. Tepper, and George L. Watson concluded in 1968 that “as long as social welfare issues continue to be both political objects and Negro group goals and as long as the Democratic party continues to be favorably linked with such policies by Negroes, Democratic party leaders can pursue, with relative impunity, any foreign policies they desire and still be certain of overwhelming Negro electoral support.” Allan Kornberg, Elliot L. Tepper, and George L. Watson “The National Elections and Comparative Positions of Negroes and Whites on Policy,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 67 (1968), 417.

92 Hero, “American Negroes” 231.


95 About fifteen per cent merely expressed support for the NAACP without citing any particular reasons. Ten per cent of those supporting the NAACP subscribed to the domino theory and anticomunism. Three respondents felt that SNCC was overstepping its bounds as a civil rights organization while one specifically subscribed to Wilkins’ “separate issues” thesis. Ultimately twenty-three of the thirty-one polled, over 74 per cent, supported the war, sided with the NAACP, or expressed patriotic support for the government. A consultant said, “Personally I feel this war is ridiculous. If America had anything to gain I could see it. I don’t think it’s necessary and it is costly but rebelling against the U.S. Government is another thing.” A Harlem housewife explained, “I find it a difficult question at this point to choose sides. I am a mother and I am very concerned about my son and the boys who grew up with him. Last week a youngster from the neighborhood... was killed in Viet Nam. The whole neighborhood is grieving. It’s a difficult question to answer but you won’t find any one in the neighborhood who will say anything against the government.” One even quoted President Kennedy’s inaugural address saying, “Ask not...” “The War in Viet Nam; Where Do You Stand?” *The Amsterdam News* (New York), 15 January 1966, 1, 40.

96 The first woman cited her resentment of the disproportionate representation of black soldiers among the troops and the fact that she had a friend in Vietnam who “says it is worse than what we read in the
papers.” The second simply stated that she was “not in favor of our black soldiers dying in Vietnam or any other place.” One of the men proposed allowing civil rights workers to receive military credit for working in military hospitals or for the Red Cross while the other echoed SNCC’s statement claiming that “our sons will not go to South Viet Nam to die when our fight for freedom is here in the USA.”


100 Simeon Booker, Ticker Tape U.S.A., *Jet*, March 3, 1966, 12. A week later Booker argued that “the failure of Negro leadership to get involved on the issue of Vietnam spawns more inertia at the State Dept. in upgrading Negroes to policymaking slots.... This is tragic for a voting bloc as large and sensitive as the U.S. Negro support.” Simeon Booker, Ticker Tape U.S.A., *Jet*, March 10, 1966, 12.


102 Memo from Lee White to LBJ, January 13, 1965, all WHCF, Box 8, Folder: PE 2 12/21/64-3/2/65, LBJL. Young, himself, was savvy enough to know that public campaigns did more harm than good, see Weiss, *Whitney Young*, 156.


104 He had provided a similar service to Young in 1962 just a year after Young became Executive Director of the organization. Both blessed and cursed with the southern politician's penchant for hyperbole, LBJ gave a speech that, according Young, “made mine sound like the moderate!” See Whitney Young, Oral History, LBJL, 3-4; *Blacks in the City*, 406; Dickerson, *Militant Mediator*, 246.


106 Whitney M. Young, Jr., “Should There Be ‘Compensation’ for Negroes,” *New York Times Magazine*, October 6, 1963, 43, 129-31; Louax, *The Negro Revolt*, 212; Weiss, *Whitney M. Young*, 154-55; Dickerson, *Militant Mediator*, 255; In fact, if historian Carl Brauer is correct that invoking the “analogue of war” in 1964 was of “uncertain” paternity, perhaps he should have looked to Whitney Young. In 1962, about the same time that Young was talking weekly and sharing his ideas (including an early draft of the Urban League’s Domestic Marshall Plan) with Vice President Johnson, he told...
journalist Louis Lomax, "we may as well realize that we are at war—at war against prejudice and
discrimination, against apathy and indifference, against rationalization, greed, selfishness and
69 (June 1982), 117; Louis Lomax, The Negro Revolt, 220.

107 Weiss, Whitney M. Young, 154-55; Lyndon B. Johnson, Commencement Address at Howard
University: "To Fulfill These Rights," June 4, 1965, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States

108 Wilkins, Standing Fast, 311. Wilkins rejected affirmative action, just as he had rejected addressing
economic parity in the 1930s. He defined the goals of the movement in terms of individual liberty and
freedom which were consistent with the public consensus which felt compelled to provide only
technical guarantees of legal equality through passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting
Rights Act of 1965. Farmer, Lay Bare the Heart, 221-2; Keppel, The Work, 160; Chafe, "One Struggle
Ends," 147.

Magazine, October 6, 1963, 43, 129-31; Lomax, The Negro Revolt, 212; Weiss, Whitney M. Young,
154-55; Dickerson, Militant Mediator, 255.

110 See Barton J. Bernstein, "The New Deal: The Conservative Achievements of Liberal Reform," in
Towards A New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History, ed. Barton J. Bernstein (New York:
Pantheon Books, 1968), 263-88 and Barton J. Bernstein, "America in War and Peace: The Test of
Liberalism," in Twentieth Century America: Recent Interpretations, ed. Barton J. Bernstein and Allen J.

111 George Lipsitz, The Possessive Investment in Whiteness, Philadelphia: Temple University Press,
1998), 19-20. Kenneth L. Kusner, "African Americans in the City Since World War II: From the
Industrial to the Post-Industrial Era," Journal of Urban History 21 (May 1995): 468-70; Raymond A.
Mohr, "The Transformation of Urban American Since the Second World War," Amerikastudien 33

112 Denton L. Watson, Lion in the Lobby: Clarence Mitchell, Jr.'s Struggle for the Passage of Civil
Rights Laws (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1990), 715-16; Juan Williams,

113 "Now it's wise to remember that the so-called escalation of the Viet Nam war was a product of an
agreement between [President Johnson] and the members of Congress. Both the leaders of the
Democratic and of the Republican parties all supported the war.... So without calling names, I
recommend newspapers of that period for anybody to see, I think that we'll have to say that part of this
unpopularity, so-called, of the President was the result of a campaign." Hobart Taylor, Oral History,
LBIL, Tape 2, 2; For a more in-depth discussion of how the ideology of the Johnson administration
moved beyond the liberal consensus in the mid-1960s see Hamby, Liberalism and Its Challengers, viii,
34, 233; William H. Chafe, "The End of One Struggle, the Beginning of Another" Comment by J.
Mills Thornton III, in The Civil Rights Movement in America, ed. Charles W. Eagles (Jackson:
University Press of Mississippi, 1986), 147. Also see "With But One Voice," The Nation, April 24,
1967, 515-16.
According to Alexander the job of a civil rights leader was not to say, “Thank you,” no matter what white politicians said... You’re an advocate. In a sense, it’s like a lawyer’s role. You don’t, because you’re half-way though the case thank... the judge for listening. And I think some of them stopped and thanked the judge for listening... he had to keep listening, and I don’t think he was served well by those who stopped him... [That]... special kind of relationship... should be a vehicle for moving a man along. That’s where you provide your greatest service, not just saying, ‘Add Title 18 to the bill’. Clifford Alexander, Oral History, LBJL, Tape 2, 22-3.


Fairclough, “King and Vietnam,” 25-26; Garrow, Bearing the Cross, 438.

“Reaffirmation of National Urban League Role in International Affairs,” Resolution I Adopted by the Delegate Assembly, National Conference of the Urban League, Miami Beach, FL, August 2, 1965, NUL Papers, Part II, Box 2, Folder No. 5: Administrative and Public Affairs, Communications Dept., Administrative Division, Annual Conference, August 1965- August 1967, LOC.

“Reaffirmation of National Urban League Role in International Affairs,” Resolution I Adopted by the Delegate Assembly, National Conference of the Urban League, Miami Beach, FL, August 2, 1965, NUL Papers, Part II, Box 2, Folder No. 5: Administrative and Public Affairs, Communications Dept., Administrative Division, Annual Conference, August 1965- August 1967, LOC.


Whitney Young, “To Be Equal” column: “Rights Program Downgraded,” November 3, 1965, NUL Papers, Part II, Series I, Box 18, Administrative Department, General Dept. File, Folder: 1965 The Federal Government, Office of the Vice President, LOC. Humphrey attempted to save face by contending that Young was mistaken: “The Vice President has not been cut out,” wrote Humphrey. “He still continues to be the coordinator and the President’s chief advisor on civil rights... Be assured, Whitney, that a man who has put twenty years of effort into the civil rights movement such as I have does not intend to see the program weakened.” Young was not persuaded, nor was anyone else. Letter from Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey to Whitney Young, November 8, 1965, NUL Papers, Part II, Series I, Box 18, Administrative Department, General Dept. File, Folder: 1965 The Federal Government, Office of the Vice President, LOC; Later Young would comment that “...Mr. Johnson, after smarting under the restrictions of being a Vice President, because of his own personality and drive, found himself probably doing some of the same things to Mr. Humphrey.” Whitney Young, Oral History, LBJL, 2; Also see Thurber, Politics of Equality, 181-4.

Memo to LBJ from Joe Califano, March 16, 1966, Diary Backup Files, Box 31, Folder: Appointment File [Diary Backup] 3/18/66, LBJL.

The Chicago Defender ran a front page story reporting that Johnson “administration budget planners may cut $400-million-a-year” from the school aid program to school districts educating the children of military families and federal employees “because of the soaring costs of the Viet Nam war” and before the month was out President Johnson asked Congress for an additional $12.8 billion for the war effort “Viet Needs Cut Into School Funds,” Chicago Defender, 1-7 January 1966, 1; Gene Grove, “The Urban League Turns a Corner,” Tuesday, August 1966, 15; Fairclough, “King and Vietnam,” 27.
123 "War on Poverty: 'Present Danger,'" Newsweek, August 8, 1966, 22. That is exactly what Jesse Gray, New York City’s Chairman of the Community Council on Housing intended to do in a series of telegrams to “Big Six” leaders prior to the White House Conference on Civil Rights. According to one source the first telegram, sent to Martin Luther King, Jr., would call upon King to demand that the Administration “spend as much money on relieving the problems of ghettos as it is spending on the war in Viet Nam.” Anonymous Memo to Whitney Young, no date, Young Papers, Box 63, Folder: White House Conference, “To Fulfill These Rights,” Misc. – 1966, Columbia.


127 “The President’s Civil Right Message, The Crisis, May 1966, 246-7; Roy Wilkins Oral History Interview, 15-16, LBJ.


130 Memo from Louis Martin to Joseph Califano, September 24, 1965, WHCF, Box 1.; Folder: HU2 Equality of the Races, 9/25/65-11/2/65, LBJL; Memo from Hobart Taylor to LBJ, August 30, 1965, WHCF, Box 6, Folder: BE4 2/26/65-7/6/66, LBJL.


132 Dallek, Flawed Giant, 24; Stern, Calculating Visions, 85-6.


Whitney Young, “A New Look at the Draft,” Whitney M. Young Papers, Box 195, Folder: Speeches, To Be Equal #40, 10/5/66 “ A New Look at the Draft”, Columbia. Draft article for American Child magazine, “Drafting the Army into the War on Poverty,” NUL Papers, Part III, Box 424, Folder: Executive Office, Presidential Files, Young, Whitney M. articles, “D-I” 6/66-3/71 (2 of 8), LOC. Sol Stern warned that “it is extremely dangerous to try to use the military to solve social problems in a society that is torn by racial conflict.... The military experience is a very special one; when it is over there is an entirely different ball game to go home to.” Sol Stern, “When the Black G.I. Comes Back From Vietnam,” New York Times Magazine, March 24, 1968, 41.

Young’s meeting with President Johnson is also credited with the creation of Project Transition, an accelerated Defense Department jobs program, that brought job-training and employment opportunities to soon-to-be discharged servicemen at military installations. According Sol Stern, “priority for participation in the program [went] to minority-group G.I.’s who have not learned a useful skill which in the service’ and urban police departments were encouraged to recruit black servicemen. Sol Stern, “When the Black G.I. Comes Back From Vietnam,” New York Times Magazine, March 24, 1968, 39.

Clifford Alexander contended that traditional civil rights leaders like Wilkins tended to be “a little awestruck” by the accouterments of power when dealing with the President.” Clifford Alexander Oral History, LBJL, Tape 1, 16.


A single letter from an unconvincing antiwar activist contended that Young was “obviously sent by LBJ to Vietnam to return with the glad tidings of a) integration of the armed forces, b) patriotism of Negro servicemen, and c) expression that the latter believe that we ‘do the right thing in Vietnam ...I believe that by letting yourself [be] used as a tool of LBJ you have outmaneuvered yourself and lost the good will of many citizens such as myself.” Letter to Whitney Young from K.E. Wallach, July 25, 1966, Young Papers, Box 3, Columbia.

Anthony Mancini, The New York Post, 18 July 1966; Press Releases July 16 and 18, 1966, Whitney M. Young Papers, Box 209, Folder: NUL-WMY, Jr. Statements 1966, Vietnam Trip New July 18, Columbia. According to Sol Stern, Young’s conversation with the President was also responsible for the Defense Department’s accelerated jobs program known as Project Transition that brings private industry onto military installations to conduct job training and encourages urban police departments to recruit black servicemen. Sol Stern, “When the Black G.I. Comes Back From Vietnam,” New York Times Magazine, March 24, 1968, 39. Also Young had previously investigated the conditions of black servicemen as a member of the Gesell Committee appointed by President Kennedy.

Jet magazine’s Simeon Booker also found Vietnam to be the racial laboratory Young spoke of during his two weeks in Vietnam in 1965. He wrote, “Vietnam is no racial utopia.... But the conflict is notably free of the more obnoxious racial inequities that have characterized America’s past wars.” Unfortunately this picture would not last. Simeon Booker, “Negroes in Vietnam: ‘We, Too, Are Americans,” Ebony November 1965, 93. Also see similar findings in “The Great Society--in Uniform,” Newsweek, August 22, 1966, 46-8; “The Integrated Society,” Time, December 22, 1966, 22;

143 Memo to LBJ from Joe Califano and telegram from Henry Cabot Lodge, July 23, 1966, WHCF, Box 42, Folder: FO 5 6/30/66 – 8/3/66, LBJL.


145 National Urban League Press Release, July 27, 1966, Young Papers, Box 211, Columbia; Clifford Alexander, OH, LBJL, Tape 1, 47-8 and Tape 2, 16-17.
CHAPTER 4

NEITHER HAWKS NOR DOVES: WHEN THE WAR ON POVERTY GIVES WAY TO THE WAR IN VIETNAM

"Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young, Jr. understood that Lyndon Johnson's imperial presidency brooked no public corrections on Vietnam; and with or without clothes this emperor still shaped policies critical to Negroes."1

Robert Weisbrot

"I'm not even opposed to the war in Viet Nam, but I recognize the reality that this country cannot do two things on a large scale at the same time."2

Patricia Roberts Harris

"The more that white folk trust and respect a black leader, the greater the suspicion in the black community."3

Andrew Young

"The task is to give 20 million Negroes the same chance as every other American to learn and grow, to work and share in society, to develop their abilities—physical, mental and spiritual, and to pursue their individual happiness... I have come back here to Howard today to renew my commitment to that task, and to remind you and to tell you again that so long as I live, in public or private life, I shall never retract or amend that commitment... I do not want to and I never expect to turn back."4

Lyndon B. Johnson

"I knew that America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as adventures in Vietnam continued to draw men and skills and money like some demonic destructive suction tube."5

Martin Luther King, Jr.

In the spring of 1967 the ground shifted beneath the feet of LBJ stalwarts like Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young. Before then, moderate civil rights leaders could dismiss the antiwar pronouncements of their “Big Five” colleagues as the antics of a
couple of financially-strapped, radical student organizations whose followers numbered in the hundreds and whose responses to the important issues of the day were little more than slogans created to appeal to extremists. But when Martin Luther King, Jr. publicly denounced the administration’s policies in Southeast Asia and joined the antiwar movement in April 1967, he insured that antiwar sentiment could neither be dismissed nor ignored by other civil rights leaders. The subject that had been overpowered by the unwillingness of black leaders in 1965 to “risk a civil rights consensus by playing with foreign policy fire” and overshadowed by the rise of the Black Power movement in 1966 would now be inescapable as everyone in the civil rights community was forced to choose sides and live with the consequences of such decisions. In 1967, as journalist David Halberstam wrote, “the vital issue of the time was not civil rights, but Vietnam.”

Although Young, Wilkins, and King chose different sides regarding Vietnam, their decisions were based on a common set of domestic concerns. This domestic pivot not only linked King, Wilkins, and Young to each other, but also to broader African American opinion on the war. The rise of African American antiwar sentiment was as much a response to the increasingly apparent de-escalation and failure of the War on Poverty as it was to the escalation and increasingly apparent failure of the war in Vietnam. In addition, its focus on an intractable, Southern-dominated Congress and equally intractable Southern draft boards, rather than on Lyndon Johnson, made African American opposition distinct from that of the mainstream community. There
was no “dump Johnson” movement in the African American community. These
distinctions defined not only African American opinion on the war, but also the
relationship between the Johnson White House, moderate civil rights leaders, and the
African American community, but also the direction and tone of the civil rights
movement from January 1967 to Lyndon Johnson’s withdrawal in March 1968 from
the presidential race.8

Neither support nor opposition was entirely comfortable position for African
American leaders. While Wilkins received even more administration assistance in his
efforts to dethrone King and the Urban League’s financial fortunes grew exponentially
from government, corporate, and foundation support, their increased identification with
the administration made it impossible for Wilkins and Young to ward off what White
House aide Harry McPherson called “the curse of the ‘President’s boy’” during the
final two years of the Johnson presidency.9 And while this was of little consequence to
Wilkins, who was already considered a de facto member of the President’s staff and
merely returned the disdain of “militants,” it was particularly troubling for Young who
defined himself and his organization as brokers rather than standard bearers. The
credibility of the Urban League depended on its ability to be the bridge between “the
have and have-nots.”10 Identifying to closely with any single camp only diminished the
organization’s effectiveness in this role. Yet as the administration’s reputation and
influence sagged, it increasingly relied on Young and Wilkins for support whether in
the streets of Newark, Saigon, or Tehran.11

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Before 1967, King, like Robert Kennedy, had found, in the words of Arthur Schlesinger, that “So long as the Great Society absorbed the President, there was strong reason...despite differences on foreign policy, not to break with the administration.”¹² But only days into the new year it became clear that King no longer believed this was the case. In early January, White House Aide Clifford Alexander informed the President of his conversation with King regarding King’s “public misunderstanding” of the President’s recent State of the Union message. “Personally concerned,” Alexander sought to refute King’s assertion that there had been “a retreat by the Administration” on civil rights and domestic programs by offering a “point-by-point explanation of the progressive forward steps” the President had proposed “in every relevant field,” despite Vietnam expenditures for the new fiscal year. At the time Alexander believed King was “quite impressed with the argument” because he had “promised to go back and read the entire message.” But three months later King broke with the administration on Vietnam and joined the antiwar movement, yielding to the combined weight of his broad international perspective, the moral objections he’d had since the escalation in 1965, and concerns about the negative impact of the war in Vietnam on domestic social welfare programs.¹³

By the spring of 1967 Alexander’s arguments were little more than semantics to civil rights leaders like King, and even Young, who did not need the help of scholars like James Schneider to know that the War on Poverty experienced “a loss of growth” after 1965. A Johnson defender, Schneider admits that the last major initiatives of the
Great Society came in 1966 and that measures like the community action programs were “gutted” in the administration’s final two years. But he contends that the fact that more than half of the freshman Democratic class of 1964 in the House of Representatives, which had provided “staunch support” for Great Society initiatives, failed to win reelection doomed subsequent Great Society initiatives more than the cost of the war.\(^14\) At the beginning of 1967 Whitney Young may have agreed with Schneider, but by the end of it he also shared King’s view that “It may be true technically... that you can have guns and butter, ... it is a fact of life that where your heart is there your money will go, and the heart of the Administration is in that war in Vietnam. The heart of the Congress is in that war. As long as that is true, that is where the money will go.”\(^15\)

When King delivered this message and a public condemnation of U.S. policy to the nation at New York’s Riverside Church on April 4, 1967, exactly one year before his assassination, it would become, arguably, the second most pivotal speech of his career and equally pivotal for the direction of the civil rights movement. By joining the peace movement King was, in the words of David Halberstam, “taking on the President of the United States, challenging what is deemed national security, [and] linking by his very presence much of the civil-rights movement with the peace movement.”\(^16\) If the August 1963 “I Have A Dream” speech had been the pinnacle of King’s career, then surely the April 1967 “Beyond Vietnam” speech was the nadir. It showered King with broad condemnation in both the black and white press, shattered what was left of the
fragile moderate civil rights coalition, destroyed his already tenuous relationship with civil rights allies in the government, especially in the White House, re-energized the FBI’s campaign of surveillance and harassment against him, and distanced him from many African Americans who, in having to choose between their civil rights hero and their civil rights president, in the words of Carl Rowan, now faced their “greatest dilemma since the post-World War I era.” 17 And, perhaps most importantly in this context, it changed the relationship between the Johnson administration and the moderate wing of the civil rights movement in ways that would have important consequences for King, Young, and Wilkins personally, the future of their organizations, and the future of the civil rights movement.18

By joining the antiwar movement King reduced the administration’s civil rights allies and emissaries at a time when urban riots, black militancy, white backlash and the African American and international community’s growing disapproval of the war made its need for them more critical than ever. Although relations between King and the Johnson White House had never been warm, before 1967 both camps had had an interest in keeping the lines of communication open. Lyndon Johnson was the most powerful leader in the world and the best friend the civil rights movement had ever had in the Oval Office. Meanwhile King, even with his influence waning in an era of growing militancy, was still a potent worldwide symbol of American progress in the civil rights struggle and greatly admired by most African Americans. In addition, his presence at White House meetings lent an added imprimatur of legitimacy to the White
House civil rights agenda by demonstrating the administration’s willingness to work with more than just the President’s “favorites.” But according to both Democratic National Committee Deputy Chair Louis Martin, who often acted as the White House liaison to the civil rights community, and King lieutenant Andrew Young, by January of 1967, “The Vietnam issue split them completely. And then [King] finally didn’t want to see [Johnson] at all.”19

Of course, contact with King was more problematic for the White House as well. As civil rights historian Robert Weisbrot noted, “Lyndon Johnson... did not admit distinctions between black dissenters for peace, [and] dupes of the Communist regimes in Hanoi, Peking, and Moscow,” nor between “antiwar demonstrators and ghetto rioters.” The President, explained FBI historian Kenneth O’Reilly, “saw every dissident as a personal enemy and he saw all of his enemies united and plotting against him. The civil rights movement and the peace movement never fully embraced each other but in Johnson’s mind they did.”20 King was the personification of that imagined embrace. Of course, the president’s mind was greatly aided in reaching this conclusion by the FBI’s continuous drip of negative information that King was a moral degenerate,21 a communist puppet, and a political threat.22 A man of John Kennedy’s own sexual history and personal detachment may have looked upon such information with less consequence, but it was totally counter to Johnson’s personality to do so in light of King’s already annoying independence from the White House game plan. Johnson’s Attorney General Ramsey Clark lamented the way in which “The course of
the civil rights movement may have been altered by such a practice. The prejudice may have reached men who might otherwise have given great support—including even the President of the United States.”23 This prejudice was particularly evident in a memo sent to the president by White House aide John P. Roche, the day after King’s Riverside Church speech. Roche, who would coordinate White House efforts to create the Citizens Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam, claimed that the speech was an indication that King had “thrown in with the commies” who “have played him (and his driving wife) like a trout.” Roche contended that while the association may guarantee King “ideological valet service… a crowd to applaud, money to keep up his standard of living, etc.,” his “recruitment to ‘peace’ [would] cut two ways: he will become the folk-hero of the alienated whites, but lose his Negro support both among ‘black nationalists’ (who see him as a threat to their operations) and among the great bulk of the Negro community who are solid, sensible supporters of the Administration.”24

Roche had at least one thing right: Despite their admiration for King, a majority of African Americans were unwilling to follow him into the antiwar movement.25 A Harris poll taken shortly after King’s Riverside Church speech indicated that 48 per cent of African Americans disagreed with King’s stand and another 27 per cent were reserving judgment.26 A Chicago Daily Defender poll found that 52% of those polled in nine black neighborhoods “did not feel that the U.S. should abandon its Viet course.” In six of the nine neighborhoods polled support for the war ranged from 55 to 75
percent. The newspaper concluded that “On the whole [those polled] expressed a willingness to go along—albeit blindly—with the President’s view of how the Viet problem should be handled.” They also concluded “had the poll been taken before the King anti-war statement, a greater number of Negroes would have favored continuing the U.S. Viet war policy.”27 Although the newspaper found considerably more support for King’s position when it returned to the same neighborhoods three weeks later, war support for the administration’s policies was still above fifty per cent in five of the nine neighborhoods polled.28 Powerful factors like the large number of black men already serving in Vietnam, a reluctance to speak against the government for fear of being labeled unpatriotic or a communist, opportunities for training and advancement presented by a, finally, integrated military service, the silence of respected leaders, more pressing day-to-day concerns, and loyalty to President Johnson, insured that the nascent African American antiwar movement would continue to lag far behind that of the white community.29

Journalist David Halberstam as well as White House observers also discovered that “Peace is not a sure issue” in the nation’s ghettos in 1967. As proof, Halberstam related the experience of a radical Negro leader who “thought Vietnam would be an easy whipping boy until he began to hang around Harlem bars, where he found you don’t knock the war (black faces under green berets).” Halberstam noted that “some of King’s best friends fear that Roy Wilkins may be wiser than King about how Negroes in the ghetto feel about Vietnam.”30 And in tours of ghettos in Baltimore,
Philadelphia, New York, Detroit, Chicago, and Cleveland in the winter and spring of
1967 White House aides and fellows discovered "all shades of opinion" on the war.
White House fellow Sherwin Markman, visiting "the worst parts of the Negro ghetto of
Chicago" in January of 1967, encountered both a militant University of Chicago-
educated Negro leader who said, "The Viet Cong never called me a nigger," as well as
an equally committed Negro leader who said, "The Negro has a stake in this country
and must fight for it in Viet Nam just as we did in World War II." In Philadelphia, he
met neighborhood activist and minister Leon Sullivan, whom he described as "solely
concerned with civil rights and . . . not . . . in Vietnam debates." An aide dispatched to
New York reported that while "issues such as Vietnam, Adam Clayton Powell, and
Cassius Clay were talked about" in New York ghettos, "by and large, people
supported the Government on Vietnam, were mildly disapproving of Clay, and
shrugged about Powell." This included longtime New York Amsterdam News reporter
Jim Booker who was "very loyal to the Johnson administration." The aides found
that few ghetto leaders in Baltimore were "concerned about remote matters like the
war in Vietnam" and that most believed "Cassius Clay and Martin Luther King have
lost followers because of their preoccupation with Vietnam."

Despite the prevailing view that African Americans were disproportionately
against the war, the level of African American support for the Administration in 1967
was not wildly different from the views of the mainstream Americans who also
continued to support the administration's foreign policy in Southeast Asia. In the
summer of 1967, Newsweek magazine noted that while “no sector of American society has given more to the Vietnam War than the Negro community… the number of Negroes who expressed broad support for U.S. participation was not notably smaller than the number of whites.”\textsuperscript{35} It presented the results of a June 1967 Louis Harris poll that found that three out of four Americans generally supported the war and believed that it was “essential to U.S. security to fight to keep the Communist from taking over all of Asia.” Two out of three felt the U.S. had “a commitment to help the South Vietnamese resist the Viet Cong.” The magazine concluded that while “it is the vocal dissent on the left that captures the most public attention, the extreme doves are a shrinking minority.”\textsuperscript{36} In fact one group of researchers dubbed 1967 “the year of the hawk” since “escalation became the preference of most Americans while withdrawal sentiment dropped off to very small proportions.”\textsuperscript{37} Presidential historian Alonzo Hamby, no fan of Lyndon Johnson, noted that “Gallup, Roper, and the others consistently found that through mid-1967 the public was much more constant and tolerant in its backing of Johnson’s involvement in Vietnam than had been the case with Truman’s intervention in Korea.”\textsuperscript{38} In fact, Hamby admits that throughout the 1960s the “antiwar movement [was] primarily composed of representatives of the intelligentsia and their children, [who] tended to be privileged and cosmopolitan.”\textsuperscript{39} Clearly the overwhelming majority of black Americans were neither.

How this misperception came to be the prevailing view is illustrated in a 1967 memo to the President from White House aide Clifford Alexander after the April 15th
Spring Mobilization to End the War in New York. According to Alexander’s father, only 500 people from Harlem marched to join King and the rest of the protesters at the United Nations, while the presence of more than 4,000 Harlem residents at a parade to support “our men in Vietnam and the Police” received no coverage by “the general press or television.” The younger Alexander passed on the note and a newspaper clipping to the President to illustrate yet “another instance of a rather subjective, selective coverage of events in the Negro community.” And while King may not have agreed with the senior Alexander’s assessment of the size of the crowd, he was inclined to agree with the younger Alexander’s assessment of the news media’s “selective coverage.” When Whitney Young remarked that he wished King “could give more attention to civil rights,” King responded “defensively and with some exasperation,” according to David Garrow, that he was giving most of his attention to civil rights, but the press was giving most of its attention to what he was saying on Vietnam.

Exactly what King and other African Americans who opposed the war said is crucial to understanding the basis of African American opinion on the Vietnam War. When the East River Chairman of CORE invited black New Yorkers to join an expected 20,000 blacks to march in the Spring Mobilization, the invitation contained quotations from both Congressman Adam Clayton Powell and King, both vocal opponents of the war. Powell declared “The student draft deferment test is reminiscent of Hitler. First we provide an inferior education to Black students. Next we give them a series of tests that many will flunk because of inferior education. Then we pack these
academic failures off to Vietnam to be killed.” Similarly, King stated: “We are willing to make the Black man a 100% citizen in warfare, but reduce him to a 50% citizen on American soil. One half of all Black Peoples live in substandard housing and they have one-half the income of the Whites. There are twice as many Black men in combat in Vietnam, and twice as many died in action as whites in proportion to their numbers.”

More important than the validity of their assertions was the selection of these particular statements by mobilization organizers to attract black marchers and the anti-draft and domestic focus of the rhetoric. Half of the concerns cited by Powell and King were domestic issues like poverty, education, and housing and the other half pertained to inequities in the administration of the draft. There was not a single mention of communism or President Johnson. Instead a poster for the rally depicted an “Uncle Sam” figure with a devil’s tail pulling back a Klansman lynching a black man by hanging him from the window of a building labeled draft board. The caption read: “HOLD IT STUPID! WE DON’T LYNCH NIGGERS LIKE THAT NOWAYS—WE CAN DRAFT THEM AND GET THE SAME RESULTS IN VIETNAM!”

The antiwar protest of poor, urban, marginally-educated, African Americans was different in quantity, quality, and kind from that of the affluent, cosmopolitan, college-educated whites who dominated the antiwar movement of the 1960s. As Peter Levy explained,

black and white communities arrived at their antiwar convictions from different directions. For whites, criticism of the war grew out of abstract and moral concerns. They came to the antiwar movement through teach-ins, the media and draft notices (more
often than not evaded through a student deferment)... Blacks felt the sting of war via high casualty rates, lost federal funds for domestic programs, and the hypocrisy of being called to fight for rights that they did not enjoy at home.\textsuperscript{44}

The issue for African American protestors was not the threat of worldwide communism, or solidarity with other oppressed peoples of color. Instead, researchers found that despite the rhetoric of Black Panther Party leaders, most blacks were “unlikely... to identify in any automatic way with the dark-skinned peasants of Southeast Asia. For the majority, war opposition is more pragmatic... tied in with racial conflicts here at home; Vietnam [was] another example of blacks being given the dirty and dangerous jobs to do by the white majority, despite generally shabby treatment that may be expected after the service is over.”\textsuperscript{45}

African Americans focused on distinct issues that directly affected the black community. Their causes were initiatives like Project One Hundred Thousand and all-white draft boards that made decisions that resulted in disproportionate induction and casualty rates for black men yet were apparently impervious to appeal.\textsuperscript{46} A 1967 study by Congressional Representative Augustus Hawkins of California found that draft boards, like southern registrars before the Voting Rights Act, operated with “practically unfettered power” and “the utmost caprice and non-uniformity” issuing decisions that “heavily weighted in favor of age, white skin and service in past wars.”\textsuperscript{47}

Their targets were governors who refused to follow civil rights laws while appointing all-white draft board members and a rural- and Southern-dominated Congress in
apparent retreat from the War on Poverty. These were hardly the concerns of affluent white college students, the predominant anti-war protestors in the 1960s when deferments were still easily obtainable, before the institution of the lottery system in 1969. It was a movement that had evolved as Brenda Gayle Plummer explained “as much by its collective experience, as by King’s personal evolution.”

Opposition to the draft was also the focus of one of the most widely reported incidents of antiwar activism on a black college campus in 1967. And while protest by black college students could be considered even less representative of public opinion than that on white campuses since black college students represented an even smaller percentage of the African American population, it does demonstrate the way in which African American student antiwar protest in the 1960s differed from that of white students. African American protest focused on the draft, not the President or communism. Just weeks after President Johnson had been warmly welcomed to the Howard University campus, General Lewis Hershey, the head of the Selective Service, was booed off it by a small group of students. In a surprise appearance at the university’s Charter Day celebration, the President renewed his commitment to providing 20 million African Americans with “the same chance as every other American to learn, to live, to grow, to develop his abilities to the fullest” before an appreciative audience. But General Hershey was shouted down by a phalanx of protestors carrying signs that read “Draft beer, not students” and “America is the black man’s battleground.” According to one Howard University student, in the spring of 1967
“people were just becoming aware of the Vietnamese war, and the fact that people were being drafted and sent to Vietnam and that a large number of those people were black people.”  

Yet because they had prevented General Hershey from speaking and because antiwar protest was new to the Howard campus, the demonstration was widely reported in both the black and white press despite involving only 35 to 50 students. The Washington Afro-American newspaper asserted that Hershey was “the target of strident protest from the pacifist element on any campus he visits,” citing a cool and critical, though less dramatic, reception the previous day at Morgan State University in Baltimore. Admitting that the demonstration “was no earthquake,” the Washington Post deemed it a “significant rumbling” because it was an indication of a new level of activism for the “conservative,” “middle class” campus. In fact, the remainder of the story focused on this new student activism on campus surrounding a variety of issues from the Congress’ treatment of Adam Clayton Powell, to the lack of due process in student disciplinary proceedings and the lack of scholarships for Howard athletes. This emphasis on general activism was echoed in a front-page story in the Washington Afro-American.

The net effect of the Hershey incident, another student recalled, was to “polarize those who supported the demonstration, or at least their right to have it, [from] those who said it was a disgrace and an embarrassment to the university and so forth.” This was especially true after a group of student government leaders, led by
Gloster Current, Jr., son of the NAACP's Director of Branches and Membership, called a press conference to apologize for the demonstration on behalf of "responsible students." At a press conference where "measures were taken to insure that none of the 'racial' groups were admitted," Current assured reporters that the student leaders were not acting as "pawns" of the administration and that the students themselves had called for the press conference. Then Current, sounding suspiciously like his father's boss, Roy Wilkins, called the demonstrators "publicity seeking sensationalists who do not represent the majority of Howard's students."  

In the spring of 1967, Wilkins had seized upon the opportunity, finally, to attack King openly. He accused King of "saying a lot of things just to get his name in the newspapers and his face on TV," resulting in an angry public confrontation between the former civil rights allies. In his first column after King's speech Wilkins wrote, "While Dr. King is a distinguished civil rights leader, he is not the official spokesman for the entire movement." Reserving that role for himself, Wilkins explained that since "20 million Negro Americans face gigantic and complex problems here at home, involving daily their human rights, their freedoms and their opportunities, wherever they may live, to advance themselves and their children. The crusade for their civil rights, therefore, is, perforce, their No. 1 objective." Later that month Wilkins told a group of college students that he did not "believe Dr. King...as a leader in the civil rights movement has the right to mix up the civil rights fight with the Vietnam fight. By involving himself in the peace movement, King indicates that Vietnam is number
one on his agenda and civil rights is either number three, four, or five."\textsuperscript{56}

Throughout 1967 and into 1968, Wilkins used his syndicated newspaper column to attack King and defend the Johnson administration. He deliberately mis-characterized King’s antiwar activism as a call to de-emphasize civil rights for the duration of the war.\textsuperscript{57} And in August 1967 he railed against those who manipulated the emotions of the black community “for the benefit of causes connected only in an oratorical fashion to Negro jobs, schools, voting and slums here at home.” Wilkins complained that,

\begin{quote}
While some Negro leaders were moaning about Vietnam, the 1966 civil rights bill was killed... This year some groups are again occupied with Asia... while here in the U.S.A. (not Vietnam) the President proposed rent supplements to aid families in low-income housing. He has pushed the Teacher Corps plan to aid low-income school districts. His programs on Head Start, Job Corps, Neighborhood Youth Corps and Model Cities aid Negroes directly.
\end{quote}

Wilkins’ reminded his readers that “it requires skill and toughness and persistence (backed by voting power) to shepherd legislation to passage. It requires only a closed mind and a loud voice to denounce the handiest target of all, the President of the United States.”\textsuperscript{58}

By the end of the year, to the administration’s delight, Wilkins was taking on not just King, but all comers, alive or dead, in his defense of the President. In September he challenged Arkansas Senator J.W. Fulbright, to bring the same fervor to securing the “release of the 1967 civil rights bill from the Senate Judiciary Committee”
that he brought to his "obsession with Vietnam." And as 1967 drew to a close, he even elevated Johnson above martyred presidents Lincoln and Kennedy, writing,

It might serve such logic as remains among the emotional partisans in the political arena to recapitulate, in part, the President’s performance on civil rights for Negro citizens. Regardless of one’s opinion of the Johnson Administration’s foreign policy, the inescapable truth is that no President in history, with the possible exception of Abraham Lincoln, has done more for the generality of Negro citizens.... It is justifiable criticism to state that civil rights legislation has been enforced spottily, but the necessary role of the Presidency in the overall enterprise has not been shirked. At a time when California had turned back the clock on fair housing with the notorious Proposition 14, LBJ was proposing a national housing law. Rebuffed by the Senate in 1966, he presented the same proposal to Congress in 1967. In contrast, JFK’s advisers had been fearful of white opposition in the South and in Northern suburbs and had held up his executive housing order two years.

In return, the administration provided Wilkins with assistance in his attacks on King from an able group of surrogates. A month after King’s speech the board of trustees of the Freedom House "severely criticized" King for "lending his mantle of respectability" to the antiwar movement. Board members included Paul H. Douglas, head of the White House-sponsored Citizen’s Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam, Senator Edward Brooke, the NAACP’s John Morsell and Roy Wilkins, who two months earlier had received the organization’s annual Freedom Award. The group’s position paper managed to raise both racist overtones and the communist specter by calling King "a public spear-carrier of a civil disobedience program that is
demagogic and irresponsible in its attacks on our Government” and includes “well-known Communist allies and luminaries of the hate-America Left.”

And former Atlanta Congressman, Charles Weltner, now serving as a DNC deputy chair, spoke at the Detroit NAACP’s “Fight for Freedom” dinner, described by The Crisis as “the largest single fund-raising event sponsored consistently by a major civil rights organization.” Weltner reported to the White House that his speech before the over 2000 diners at $100 per plate, was “quite well received” since “applause followed” each of his “two major points” one of which was that “Viet Nam and Civil Rights don’t mix.” Weltner acknowledged that his warm reception was of mixed significance since the Detroit NAACP, while representing “the vast majority of negro economic and political power structure,” also had “little restraining influence on the militants.” Nonetheless, he used the opportunity to counter both King and SNCC’s assertion that the war was racist. According to Weltner “the real civil rights fighters of today are not marching down some avenue in New York…. The real civil rights workers today are the men fighting in Viet Nam.”

Ironically, many critics of the war would agree, since they believed that young black men who should be marching for their rights at home were indeed fighting in Vietnam for someone else’s rights abroad and that they were doing so because many were former civil rights workers who had been targeted by all-white draft boards.

In fact, NAACP officials in Mississippi and Florida were among the first to make this assertion. Convinced that southern draft boards were, in the words of Jet
magazine, "using induction as a weapon to punish civil righters," Mississippi Field Director Charles Evers wrote President Johnson in the fall of 1966 to protest "the complete absence of Negroes from local draft boards in Mississippi." According to Evers the recent induction of James Jolliff, an epileptic whose 4-F classification was changed to 1-A after his position as President of the Wilkindom County NAACP became "well known to local white officials" was "convincing proof that until Negroes are appointed to these boards the draft will continue to be used in Mississippi as a weapon to punish civil rights leaders and to undermine the civil rights movement." In response to "this flagrant abuse of authority by local draft board members," Evers requested immediate action "to assure Negroes of fair representation on local draft boards" and "an immediate investigation into the case of James Jolliff." In April 1968 Evers would announce the filing of "a class action on behalf of all Negroes who are qualified to serve on local and appeal boards of the Selective Service System in Mississippi, to compel Governor John Bell Williams to nominate Negroes to those boards."  

Florida State Field Director Marvin Davies and State Presidents Rutledge Pearson and Joel Atkins contacted the White House twice in fall and winter of 1967 regarding segregated draft boards in the state. They contended that all-white draft boards were the source of black perceptions that the Vietnam conflict was "a racial war" and assured the President that if African Americans "could see members of their race serving on these draft or appeal boards... they could not logically reach false
conclusions” and have “more confidence in the Selective Service System.” They followed up by sending the President a copy of a resolution, adopted unanimously by the Florida State Conference of Branches, calling for an “executive order eliminating segregated selective service (draft) boards in Florida.” But they also sought to make clear that the resolution should “in no way be interpreted as opposition to the war in Vietnam. It [was] simply an expression of the inequities in the Selective Service System and a request that they be immediately corrected” since the subject of the resolution “could very well be the concern of Negro Southern Americans when their vote is cast in 1968.”

The 1968 election was the subject of a *Jet* magazine survey of 750 Democratic leaders, elected state and local officials and precinct chairmen, in more than 30 key cities in June 1967 that confirmed both the continuing African American support for Lyndon Johnson as well as the focus on domestic issues. The magazine found that President Johnson was still “a favorite among Negro voters’ based on his “civil rights stance,” despite “wide disagreement… over the success of his Great Society programming.” According to *Jet*, the most important issue for Negro voters was “housing, a field in which the Administration has yet to make a major dent.” In fact, the first four of the five subjects listed as important issues for the November election were domestic issues with the war coming in last. According to the story “Other subjects that are being discussed in Negro communities are the cutbacks in antipoverty programs, the lack of enforcement of previously passed civil rights laws, the toning
down of school desegregation projects and the Negro over-involvement in the Vietnam War."  

Jet’s findings also held true for African American leaders like Baseball Hall of Famer and syndicated columnist Jackie Robinson and U.N. diplomat Ralph Bunche. Both men supported the administration because of Lyndon Johnson’s record on civil rights and a belief that King was addressing an issue that was peripheral to the concerns of African Americans, to the potential detriment on the issues that concerned them most. In an open letter to King, Robinson defended President Johnson and warned that a “mismatched marriage” between the civil rights and antiwar movements would be “a disastrous alliance.” Days later Robinson, a lifelong Republican, wrote the President to thank him for “pursuing a course towards Civil Rights that no President in our history has pursued,” and to offer that despite King’s stand, “There are hundreds of thousands of us at home who [though] not certain why we are in the war… feel… that you and your staff know what is best and we are willing to support your efforts for an honorable solution to the war.”  

It seems Robinson’s views were shared by many of the editorial staffs of the black newspapers in which Robinson’s column appeared since anti-King, pro-administration editorials appeared in several of the most widely-circulated black newspapers including The New York Amsterdam News, The Pittsburgh Courier, The Norfolk Journal and Guide, and The Atlanta Daily World.  

But black newspaper editorials may also be the best example of administration manipulation of black opinion. Democratic National Committee Deputy Chair and
master White House political operative Louis Martin had been a newspaper editor and publisher since the mid-1930s. Along with the owner of the Chicago Defender, Martin had a proprietary interest in at least ten black newspapers including the Pittsburgh Courier, the Chicago Daily Defender, and the Michigan Chronicle. Martin was also a former two-term president of the National Newspaper Publishers Association which presented President Johnson with a special citation for “courage in the pursuit of justice and freedom for all men” in a special ceremony in the Cabinet Room of the White House just days before King’s April 4 speech. Together Martin and White House aide Clifford Alexander made sure that black journalists had access to the information they needed to write positive stories about the administration and according to White House counselor Harry McPherson, Martin “could get the damndest editorials at any point, praising any step Lyndon Johnson took” based on his extraordinary relationship with the black newspaper community.

But Louis Martin’s manipulation was not necessarily the whole story behind black editorial support for the administration. Two black newspapers without direct ties to Martin, the New York Amsterdam News and the Atlanta Daily World, offered among the most detailed and complete rejections of King’s anti-war activism in 1967. A front-page editorial in the New York Amsterdam News listed eight reasons why the newspaper did not share King’s views. The reasons cited included the need for unity in times of crisis, a defense of democracy, patriotism, the fact that Johnson had inherited the war, that Senator Edward Brooke had switched sides, the need to support black
soldiers, the civil rights progress of the last ten years, and the fact that Johnson had done 
more to right previous wrongs than any previous president.76

The Atlanta Daily World clearly agreed with this view, but more personal 
factors, unrelated to the war, may have contributed to their opposition to King’s view 
as well. The New York Amsterdam News made essentially the same argument in 1965 
when it condemned the Mississippi Democratic Freedom Party for supporting black 
draft resisters. The newspaper contended that “as a race we simply cannot afford to 
refuse responsibility while at the same time seek additional rights. This is simply 
contradictory to logic.” The newspaper argued that it saw “no relevancy” between the 
War on Poverty and the War in Vietnam despite King’s argument that “expenditures 
for the war were reducing funds available for the poverty program. We regret the war 
in Vietnam,” the editorial concluded, “but…our country is involved…. And at the polls 
next November the voters can pass judgment on the wisdom and justification of our 
country getting involved in the Vietnam war…. Open dissent now can only make bad 
matters worse, as we see it.”77 Two years earlier, SCLC executive director Wyatt Tee 
Walker told writer Robert Penn Warren that perhaps the Nobel Peace Prize would 
“consolidate Dr. King’s position” with “the Negro power structure” in Atlanta since 
“they have never felt comfortable with him there. There was always the fear that he 
might ‘take over’” Walker explained. “In the Scott paper, for instance… there was a 
directive never to publish his picture or mention his name on the front page.”78
The "Scott paper" was the *Atlanta Daily World* and true to Walker's explanation, the anti-King editorial appeared, without illustration, on page four.

It came as no surprise when within a week of King's "Beyond Vietnam" speech the NAACP National Board of Directors issued a unanimous resolution re-iterating Wilkins' 1965 position that the war and civil rights were "separate issues." But the role fellow Nobel Prize winner Ralph Bunche, a member of the NAACP board, played in the process is both interesting and instructive. Despite personal misgivings about American involvement in Vietnam dating back to 1964, Bunche was, according to his biographer Brian Urquhart, "the only United States Nobel Laureate who refused to sign an advertisement against Johnson and the Vietnam War in the New York Times."79 And he publicly refuted King's stand against the war, criticizing King for trying to be both a civil rights leader and antiwar spokesman and admitted to pressing fellow NAACP board members to issue a strong resolution condemning "any attempt to merge the two movements."80 Yet according to King biographer David Garrow, he also called King "to apologize privately for his public remarks and to profess complete agreement with King's views on the war, if not his mode of opposition."81 But in order to maintain his lines of communication with the Johnson administration and because of his appreciation for Johnson's stand on civil rights, Bunche steadfastly refused to speak out against the war. The president had earned his support. Apparently, like most African Americans, Bunche's gratitude outweighed his misgivings.
The resolution Bunche championed argued that King was out-of-step with the views of most African Americans whose primary concern was civil rights. "Civil rights battles," the Board asserted, "will have to be fought and won on their own merits, irrespective of the state of war or peace in the world."82 The board’s resolution, which Wilkins clearly had a hand in crafting, was printed in the April Crisis, and read in part, "To attempt to merge the civil rights movement with the peace movement, or to assume that one is dependent upon the other, is, in our judgment, a serious tactical mistake. It will serve the cause neither of civil rights nor of peace.... We are, of course, for a just peace. But there already exists dedicated organizations whose No. 1 task is to work for peace just as our No. 1 job is to work for civil rights.87

There is not much indication of disagreement with the board’s resolution since the small amount of anti-war correspondence received by the NAACP National Office in 1967-68 focused as much, if not more, on disapproval of Wilkins’ relationship with the Johnson White House and of his attacks on King as it did on the NAACP’s stand on the war. Just as the NAACP’s criticism of SNCC’s antiwar statement had been the catalyst for Vietnam correspondence received by the National Office in 1966, the spark in 1967 was the NAACP’s attack on Nobel Prize winner Martin Luther King, Jr. Because King had a much broader following than SNCC, Wilkins’ torrent of disassociations and denunciations caused the nine Vietnam letters of 1966 to multiply sevenfold in early 1967. Of the total 64 Vietnam letters received in 1967, 44 were antiwar, representing a 500% increase over the number received in 1966. All were
received within a month after King publicly joined the antiwar movement in April 1967 with 80 per cent received in the first week. Ninety per cent specifically mentioned King and 65 per cent of those chastised the NAACP for attacking him. At least half also contended that the war was immoral and that civil rights and the Vietnam War were not “separate issues.” Approximately 30 per cent expressed concern that the war was siphoning off funds that should be spent in the War on Poverty and that unity was needed among civil rights organizations to stop it. Twenty-five per cent expressed concern about the overrepresentation of black soldiers among Vietnam casualties and asserted that racism was clearly a factor in the U.S. involvement in and execution of the war. Twenty per cent resigned their memberships.84

Assistant Executive Director John Morsell responded to most of the antiwar letters, but one of his more interesting exchanges occurred with a war supporter. George Cook of Oakland, California returned a solicitation letter from the NAACP Special Contribution Fund because he was “in full agreement with President Johnson’s policies in Viet Nam” and had read, “that many of [the NAACP’s] local organizations have passed resolutions strongly protesting the President’s policies.” After assuring Cook that the organization would “manage somehow without [his] financial help,” Morsell issued a fascinating challenge. Writing that he was determined “to nail [Cook’s] lie,” Morsell dared Cook to provide “evidence that any NAACP branches have passed resolutions protesting the Administration’s Viet Nam policies.” Given the size and breadth of the organization, Morsell’s response indicated extreme confidence
in the National Office’s ability to control, or at the very least monitor, the activities of its nearly 1500 chapters. Morsell closed by writing that the NAACP spoke “only for our 440,000 members. We don’t hold you responsible for [the racism of] Senator Fulbright.”

Like the overwhelming majority of the antiwar letters, all of the twenty letters supporting the NAACP’s position were in direct response to the NAACP’s reaction to King’s decision to join the antiwar movement. Following the lead of the NAACP Board of Directors, most agreed that any attempt to mix the civil rights and peace causes was a mistake and they accused King of being in over his head by speaking on foreign policy matters. Four mentioned that they were members of the NAACP or sent contributions. Five specifically mentioned that they were white and it is likely that at least half were, based on other clues taken from a careful reading of each letter. All praised Wilkins and the NAACP for its patriotic, sensible, and well-reasoned position. Most of the pro-NAACP correspondence followed along the lines of Attorney Kenneth Griswold of St. Paul, Minnesota, who praised the way Wilkins “took the Reverend Martin Luther King to task,” and who was especially gratified by “the contrast between [Wilkins’] dignified, reasoned criticism and the subject of it.” Griswold concluded, “I concur in everything that you said. I am proud to be a follower in an organization which has you for its leader.” Or the letter of U.S. Air Force Captain John Wheelock, which read in part, “Dear Sir: I am white. I support the cause of civil rights. I support integration. I support equality of the races.... Please, please do not let anyone confuse
the civil rights effort with the conflict in Viet-Nam.... to confuse the two issues does not do justice to either.... Such careless talk makes it infinitely more difficult for my colleagues, and other intelligent and/or educated people to fully support the cause of the NAACP."  

One of the first letters of support to arrive had been from the president of the United Negro College Fund, who wrote that he hoped the NAACP’s resolution would receive “the widest possible national distribution.” He commended Wilkins on the NAACP’s stand since “it takes a good deal of courage and fortitude these days to take sane positions on explosive issues.” Wilkins responded that the NAACP “had no choice but to take the stand we did” in light of Dr. King’s actions. Wilkins opined that while “Ofentimes it is necessary to assume a position which is unpopular,” such instances were “truly difficult to cope with,” on subjects that raised “all kinds of emotional responses.” The assertions found in Wilkins’ response—the disdain for the “emotionalism” of antiwar activists, his righteous self-pity at the difficulty of assuming an “unpopular” position, and his annoyance that “a great many people tend... to assume that a declaration of one organization is automatically the position of another”—would be repeated in most of the NAACP’s Vietnam correspondence in 1967 and 1968 whether written by Wilkins or by Morsell.  

Wilkins rarely deigned to respond directly to those who questioned the NAACP’s stand on the war, preferring to respond more broadly through his newspaper column or leave the chore to Morsell. But in the summer of 1967 Wilkins exchanged
letters with attorney Daniel A. Davis, a Board Member of the Duluth, Minnesota
Chapter, who wrote Wilkins to urge that the organization take an official stand on “the
Vietnam situation.” Acknowledging that it was a “very delicate subject” and that there
“may be conflicting points of view,” Davis asked Wilkins, at the very least, to free “our
state and local units to take definite positions... since those who have stood back on the
basis of controversy or divided opinion will have failed to exercise the influence they
might otherwise have exerted.” Davis concluded, “the failure to take stands on issues
of moral concern to all people by the NAACP is an open invitation for the same type of
position to be taken by other groups with relation to civil rights.” Wilkins’ reply
offered one of the fullest expositions of Wilkins’ rationale for the NAACP’s official
“separate issues” position.

Within days, Wilkins responded with several reasons why the NAACP would
not follow Davis’ advice. First and foremost, Wilkins argued, “any campaign to have
the NAACP take a position... would be the surest way to a substantial loss in
effectiveness in the main arena of civil rights and a long period of rebuilding and
recovery at the very post-war time when a strong civil rights movement is most
necessary.” Wilkins’ explained that “the NAACP is a civil rights organization, ...with a
membership... who did not join to express their views on foreign policy or on soil
conservation or air pollution, but on civil rights.” He argued that “the civil rights issue
will suffer dissension and diversion of interest and energies” if the NAACP took a
formal stand since “the ardent doves on Vietnam could not be expected to support the
program of the national office or of a local branch where hawk sentiments showed itself.” Railing against the “strong feelings and high emotions” on both sides of the issue, Wilkins continued, “already the doves, in particular, have shown an intolerance that is in itself intolerable. In their book there is no room for dissent.” Therefore, “In the same manner that the NAACP avoids partisan political stands for the reason that we have members of all political parties in our civil rights membership,” Wilkins concluded “we have not taken any stand on ... Vietnam.”

Of course Wilkins was lying about the non-partisanship. Time and time again the NAACP under Wilkins’ leadership had been entirely partisan during the Johnson administration. In fact, within a few months, the organization’s chief lobbyist, Clarence Mitchell, would travel around the country urging NAACP state conferences to support President Johnson as a way of thanking him for doing more for the advancement of social causes than any President. And in October 1968 the NAACP printed 10,000 copies of a letter from National Board of Directors Chairman Stephen Gill Spottswood for immediate distribution “to ministers all over the country.” The letter claimed, “should former vice president Nixon emerge the winner, we face at best a stalemate on civil rights, and at worse, a thrust backward. Only a Humphrey triumph will assure a continuance of the great strides towards equalizing the status of Negro citizens with that of white Americans made under the Kennedy administration.”

Amazingly, only two Vietnam letters arrived at the NAACP National Office in 1968. Both were antiwar though strikingly different in tone. The first was a copy of a
letter to Senator Edward Brooke from professor of history, Dr. William Harbaugh of the University of Virginia. Written in a scholarly, academic tone, the letter from Harbaugh claimed that “the Vietnam War has in fact reduced somewhat our capacity -- it has already virtually destroyed our will -- to resolve the two most critical problems of our times, which are ... the urban crisis and Negro education.... There can be no resolution of our race problem so long as the moral fervor of all our people is dissipated in controversy over the war that we should never have got into.”94 In contrast, a caustic letter from attorney Edward Ulman of Los Angeles, California was a response to Wilkins’ “enraptured piece on the filial love between the young negro and white soldiers in Vietnam.” Ulman proposed that since Wilkins had “the ear of the administration perhaps the matrons of the Republican District League and their counterparts in the NAACP can plan a trip to L.A. and go to East Los Angeles and start killing Mexicans. I am sure that such an experience could promote nothing but harmony between the two races. It seems to work in Viet Nam.”95

Harsh sentiments aside, what stands out about the Vietnam correspondence received by the NAACP National Office in 1968 is the steep drop-off from the year before. Certainly it was not caused by inactivity on the war front given the Tet Offensive, General Westmoreland’s request for 200,000 more troops, and the My Lai massacre. In fact, the overall pattern of the Vietnam correspondence received by the NAACP National Office between 1965 and 1968 confirms the basic premise that the war continued to matter most as a domestic issue for the African American and civil
rights community. The real issues for the Vietnam correspondents were, first, the NAACP's obeisance to the Johnson White House and, second, its attacks on antiwar activists within the movement which accounted for the increases in 1966 and 1967.

These issues were clearly the concern of the Greenwich Village-Chelsea, New York, branch which also questioned whether Wilkins' spoke for all of the NAACP. On April 27 this branch registered its "wholehearted" support for King and "emphatic" disagreement with the National Board's resolution citing the Board's complete misunderstanding of King's intent. According to the branch, King "never asked for an organizational merger of the civil rights and peace movements," but instead called for "a forthright facing by the civil rights movement of the damage the war is doing to the hopes for racial justice and progress, both within our own country and throughout the world." Declaring that "all groups representing the conscience of America--civil rights, religious, welfare, labor," were obligated to "oppose the dishonor the continuation and escalation of the war is bringing to our country's ideals," the branch planned to "introduce or support a resolution embodying this belief" at the 1967 national convention in Boston. In fact, both the Greenwich-Chelsea and the Central City San Francisco, California branches proposed resolutions calling for an end to the war, with the Greenwich-Chelsea branch also condemning Wilkins' "unwarranted attacks on other civil rights leaders." According to the branch "the entire NAACP membership is done a disservice each time that Mr. Wilkins speaks out in the name of he NAACP
without first assuring himself that the views he is expressing are held in general agreement by the membership he is representing.”

Despite the criticism, Wilkins’ grip on the organization was strong enough to fend off any antiwar sentiment at the 1967 convention, especially with his dear friend, the President, scheduled to make an appearance. In total contradiction to the strong wording proposed by the San Francisco and Greenwich-Chelsea branches, the delegates to the 1967 convention adopted a toothless and feeble resolution re-affirming the position of the National Board that “to merge the civil rights movement with the peace movement... is a serious tactical error.” Instead the resolution urged “the Administration to continue to reexamine and pursue with vigor all avenues which will lead to a just and honorable peace. The urgent priorities of the civil rights movement dictate that the full resources and energies of the NAACP be directed toward the immediate resolution of the grave problems of racism in this country and abroad.”

Nonetheless, whether it was security concerns caused by the recent race riot in Roxbury or as reported in The Crisis the “large group of antiwar demonstrators who made it difficult for delegates to get into the auditorium as they picketed and shouted their slogans,” or the combination of “abominable weather and the return that afternoon of Defense Secretary Robert Mc Namara from Vietnam,” the presidential appearance never materialized. But the White House needn’t have worried. There would be no NAACP resolution condemning the war until Johnson was well out of office.
The Urban League would also wait until Johnson was out of office before condemning the war, beating the NAACP by a matter of months. Until then Young resisted the argument, no matter who was making it, that a choice had to be made between the War in Vietnam and the War on Poverty, despite his growing doubts about the likelihood of both guns and butter. The day after King’s Riverside Church speech, Young issued a statement that read in part, “I do not agree with either the ultra-conservative who says that we must sacrifice domestic anti-poverty programs for the war effort, nor do I agree with those who hold the opposite view, that we cannot support massive domestic programs without an immediate cessation of the war in Vietnam. I am convinced that we don’t have to face the choice between national security and internal chaos.” Therefore, Young argued that King “was tactically wrong in telling people that domestic social programs, such as anti-poverty projects, would necessarily continue to suffer because of war spending. The people who are hungry should not have to wait until the war is over.”

What to do about people who were hungry was the subtext behind the angry nose-to-nose exchange between King and Young reported by David Halberstam in the summer of 1967. Young accused King of no longer caring about the ghettos since his activism would only serve to alienate Lyndon Johnson and make it “impossible to get anything more from him for the benefit of blacks.” King argued, had the luxury of alienating the President since he was “eating well” but ghetto residents who would lose federal programs as the President dropped the War on Poverty in retaliation
for King’s ingratitude would not be so well fed. King responded that Young’s position on the war might get him a foundation grant, but that it wouldn’t get him “into the kingdom of truth.”  

Unlike the situation with Wilkins, the exchange was not the result of personal animosity. The two men were good friends. Instead Young’s desire to keep civil rights as a priority on the federal government’s “to do” list which King’s antiwar activism threatened. He consistently called on both King and the administration to focus their resources on the domestic crises despite the on-going war in Vietnam. Admittedly, the civil rights climate in 1967 was much less favorable than it had been in 1965, but in Young’s view that was all the more reason for King to lend his support to the President by staying silent. As King ally Bayard Rustin argued, “how are you going to denounce Lyndon Johnson one day and ask him the next for money for poverty, schools, housing?”

As Halberstam noted, the argument was indicative of “some very basic differences ... much deeper than the war in Vietnam.” In some ways the differences were quite simple: King wanted mass atonement; Young wanted cash. But, they also had to do with the fact that, Halberstam explained “in the split it [was] King who [was] changing, not Young or Wilkins.” They had remained secular reformers, Halberstam contended, but King had become a spiritual revolutionary. As Andrew Young explained the SCLC “saw white American middle class culture as overwhelmingly racist, materialistic, and militaristic.... SCLC in 1957 adopted the motto, 'To Redeem
the Soul of America.' Well if you’re going to redeem the soul of America there’s something wrong with the soul of America.”

In the debate over King’s antiwar activism, ironically, the “rightness or wrongness” of King’s position, for both King’s supporters and critics, was a secondary issue at best. The real question was whether he should publicly oppose a pro-civil rights administration on an international issue.

King’s supporters wondered whether King, an ordained Baptist minister, the leader of a non-violent movement, a pacifist, and a Nobel Peace Prize winner would have been expected to remain silent about a war. Michael Harrington, author of the influential book *The Other America*, wrote that it was “preposterous to think that such a man could possibly support the Administration’s Vietnam policy. His pacifist principles could hardly stop at the water’s edge... it would be an act of moral cowardice to remain silent.” Fellow SCLC ministers like Wyatt Tee Walker and Andrew Young understood that King’s activism was, as Mills Thornton explained, “at all times founded squarely upon Christianity.” In the Riverside Church speech, King said he was saddened by those who asked how he could speak about peace and civil rights: “such questions mean that the inquirers have not really known me, my commitment or my calling.”

Even before King officially joined the antiwar movement psychologist and civil rights historian Kenneth Clark had warned against the “dangerous miscalculation” that would result when political and government leaders, failing to understand the differences between civil rights groups, made requests of civil rights leaders they simply could not fulfill.
Young, on the other hand, argued that since King had come to prominence as a civil rights, not a religious, leader, it was wrong of him to use that influence in service to another cause, especially one that could be so damaging to civil rights. To Young civil rights progress wasn’t “a question of winning [whites] over morally--nobody has time for that,” he contended. “It’s sheer economics… We will either help Negroes to become constructive, productive citizens--or they will become destructive dependents…. You can make quite a case for the moral decadence of white America,” Young counseled, “but you can’t make a program based on its collapse by 1975.”

Therefore all civil rights leaders were obligated, Young explained, to continue to stay the course “not because associating with whites is, of itself, a good thing but because…. for 400 years we tilled the soil, hewed the wood, and drew the water. America grew fat and rich on our blood, sweat, and tears. Now we’ve got some back pay coming to us…no minority can afford to isolate itself away from the sources of power and into a vulnerable position.” This was why Black Power, as defined by Stokely Carmichael, made no sense to Young who told a reporter it’s “kind of inevitable when you say you want nothing to do with white people except to take their money. All that means is that you ain’t going to get the money either.”

Money, in fact, may have contributed to the harshness of the debate between King and Young. Money remained a source of tension among the groups throughout the 1960s and King’s “kingdom of truth” retort may have stemmed from envy of the Urban League’s skyrocketing financial resources when compared with other civil rights
groups. While SCLC was certainly better off than the nearly bankrupt CORE and SNCC, its 1967 income from outside sources of $932,000 was nowhere near that of the Urban League which was three times larger at $2,812,000.\textsuperscript{117} And Young’s concern over the loss of federal support for the civil rights agenda due to King’s antiwar activism, a concern shared by longtime King ally Bayard Rustin, appears well founded.\textsuperscript{118} White House records reveal that once King broke with the administration on Vietnam, the White House made sure that no future federal funding would go to his efforts to desegregate housing in Chicago.\textsuperscript{119} Meanwhile the Urban League received its first federal grant of $249,000 in 1965 and by 1969 federal contributions had reached $6.9 million.

In his studies of the finances of civil rights organizations, Herbert Haines found that “All of the more militant organizations—the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Congress of Racial Equality, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee—increased their shares of total movement income during the early 1960s then entered a period of decline.”\textsuperscript{120} Meanwhile moderate groups, particularly the Urban League, experienced steady growth in outside contributions, especially from the federal government, corporations, and foundations, throughout the decade with the Urban League’s growth after 1968 being nothing short of remarkable.\textsuperscript{121} Haines attributes the growth of the moderates to what he calls the “radical flanking effect” as the threat of militant organizations and the light from burning cities made the programs of more moderate groups palatable to conservative, monied donors like government,
corporations, and foundations. Focusing on the rise of the Black Power movement, Haines fails to connect the divergent financial fortunes of the “militants” and “moderates” to their positions on the war. Haines argues that King’s antiwar activism caused a drop off in the SCLC’s income but does not make the reverse correlation that the two black civil rights organizations that stuck with the administration on Vietnam and criticized King saw the most gains, even though the figures bear this out.

Perhaps the federal government’s growing largesse toward the organization fueled the Urban League’s continued push for both guns and butter in 1967. Until August 1967 the Urban League pointedly refused to acknowledge the impact of the war on domestic social programs. But by 1967 the connection was inescapable because of King and because the cost of the war was being used by Congress to justify cutbacks in social programs. Even though he would come to believe that King had been “more right” than he was about the deleterious effects of the war in Vietnam on the War on Poverty, Young never considered the correlation as direct as King did. Twice in the summer of 1967 Young testified before House and Senate Committees to plead unsuccessfully for more support for the War on Poverty and the Office of Economic Opportunity. Between his experiences testifying twice that summer before Congress that would refuse to pass a rat control bill for the cities’ slums, Young began to question the will of a mostly rural, Southern dominated Congress to back antipoverty measures for cities. In fact he concluded that “judging from recent
experiences’ it was ‘highly unlikely’ that the money currently spent on the war would automatically go to the war on poverty if the Vietnam War ended.\textsuperscript{129}

But by the time of the Urban League’s annual convention in August, Young began to believe that a choice would have to be made not because of a lack of resources but due to a lack of will. The following year Young would contend that “Given the response of the nation to the assassinations of Dr. King and Senator Kennedy—and to the Kerner Report—it seems far more likely that our wealthier citizens will simply get a big tax cut, or that the money will be diverted into bigger and better war toys.”\textsuperscript{130} The deliberations of convention delegates over the proper wording of a proposed statement of concern, originally entitled “Vietnam-Guns or Butter?” revealed the evolution of Young’s thinking. The discussion also provided a window on the views of Urban League delegates from around the country for whom it was becoming increasingly clear that the federal government, particularly the Congress, was backing away from its responsibilities to its urban crisis.\textsuperscript{131}

Delegates acknowledged the negative effects of the War in Vietnam but also questioned the will of Congress to fight the War on Poverty which was, after all, the League’s focus. A San Francisco delegate argued “Viet Nam is very real, but it isn’t going to go away…. [I]f it went away tomorrow it wouldn’t make any difference to the funds we need for our ghetto areas. It is a racist Congress. The Committees are dominated by Southerners and they can… they are, throwing a red herring in our path, but I don’t think we should fall into this trap…. We can’t solve the problems of the
ghetto by being hung up on Viet Nam." A member of the Urban League National Board and an officer with the Elks, one of the nation's largest fraternal organizations, agreed and argued that patriotism should work both ways: "The same people that are saying they can't finance you now because of Viet Nam would have another excuse if we weren't fighting the war. ...I was very sorry to hear one of our leading civil rights men talking about getting out of Viet Nam and going ... against the government because we are fighting the war. I belong to an organization that represents a half a million people and we believe that we ought to stick with America whenever it gets in trouble, but we think America ought to stick with the underprivileged to pull us out of this hole." A delegate from Jackson, Mississippi expressed a different, but equally important, political concern: "I am worried.... I am tormented by the title of this section—Vietnam: Guns or Butter. The truth of the matter is...we are not at this moment concerned primarily with Viet Nam. We are concerned about butter for the ghettos and for... the dignity of human rights and so forth.... I think the media would take this and do violence to us and what we stand for. Therefore, I think this is an unfortunate title—Viet Nam: Guns or Butter... We are not discussing whether we agree with Viet Nam or not."

Young agreed with the delegates and attempted to both summarize and address their concerns. He argued "it is being completely unrealistic today to not recognize that domestic programs are suffering because of our international commitments. It is being used daily as the excuse, honest or dishonest, I think in most cases dishonest, it is
a reason for inadequate financing but I would agree that it would be misunderstood if we make it appear that it is only the Viet Nam issue and not other expenditures.”

Citing the billions spent on the space program, on supersonic transport planes, and highway construction, Young emphasized, however, that he would “certainly not leave out of it that the excuses that are being given are the international excuses, the international commitments, because the programs have been cut, they are being cut even though the country has the resources, it does not have the will. It is not spending them, it is not going to spend them until we make it plain that we think this is the top priority…”

A recalcitrant Congress, elected at the mid-term elections, had abruptly halted the forward momentum of the Great Society’s domestic programs, even refusing to pass a rat control bill, just when the worst urban rioting of the decade demonstrated the need for increased funding. The toll the war in Vietnam was having on the War on Poverty was undeniable. Riots were the inevitable consequence of “palliative” federal assistance when only a massive infusion of cash into education, training, housing, and employment for urban residents would suffice. “If it means getting out of Viet Nam,” Young concluded, “get out. If it means stopping flights to the moon, stop that. It is not [just] in the interest of the minorities. It is in the interest of the salvation of this country.”

When the cheering stopped the delegates endorsed the statement of concern renamed “Adequate Financing for Domestic Programs.” It asserted that “all available
information clearly demonstrates that America is not committing sufficient of its vast 
resources to give to all Americans the sense of equality, dignity, and belonging which is 
essential to a healthy society willing to live by the rule of law.” The statement 
contended that “unless it is certain this country is affluent enough to continue to wage 
the war… and at the same time support the massive efforts which must be made to 
bring the disadvantaged minorities into the mainstream of American life, our leadership 
must choose which course of action it will follow…” In a strongly-worded paragraph 
that mirrored Young’s statement before the assembly, it concluded,

We do not recognize, in fact we totally reject, those 
arguments which say that our international commitments 
and our international competitions are of such great 
importance as to justify dooming our citizens to 
substandard living conditions and poverty, waste, neglect 
and despair. If providing money and services to our 
people means that we must stop the war in Vietnam, then 
stop it; if it means letting some other nation design the 
first supersonic passenger plane, let it.¹³⁸

Upon his return from Vietnam as a White House sponsored election observer, 
Young raised the issue again, this time at the White House in a room full of reporters. 
Although he remained a loyal supporter of the President, Young had admitted, 
privately, to being “seriously concerned about the war—lives lost, resources diverted— 
dividing the country” before returning to Vietnam.¹³⁹ Having been coerced by the 
President into going back to Vietnam, perhaps Young felt he was entitled to engage in 
his own bit of blackmail. Although he had not raised the issue in the earlier private 
session between observers and the president, Young asked if “the added expenditures
for Vietnam" would mean cut backs in programs for the cities. The President responded that the administration was “not cutting back on anything this year” and cited the $6.8 billion in city programs currently pending before Congress. But this assurance, according to Johnson biographer Robert Dallek, “masked Johnson’s conviction that he had to cut reform programs to the bone in 1967.” When Johnson had introduced this programs to civil rights leaders in the winter of 1967 Young warned administration officials against the two issues he believed had doomed the previous year’s package: “First, northern liberals weakened as the programs began to hit segregation in the north and second, the unpopularity of the war in Viet Nam.” But in 1967 the weakened liberal was the southern Democrat in the White House.

Young’s sense of the unpopularity of the war in 1967 was just one of the reasons he was reluctant to return to Viet Nam as part of a White House-sponsored team of observers. By the summer of 1967 Young was already sitting on five presidentially-appointed commissions and had already served on four others. Yet through his public and private insistence that the administration do more in the War on Poverty and his critique of the unfairness of the draft, he had skillfully maintained the veneer of independence through most of 1967. Young understood that too close an association with the White House would damage his credibility with ghetto residents making it increasingly difficult for the Urban League to be the broker between those who had the resources to give and those who needed the resources the most.
But he would lose the fight in August 1967 just as he was beginning to have serious doubts about the possibility of both guns and butter. When the President decided to name Young to a delegation of senators, governors, mayors, businessmen, civic leaders, clergy, and publishers sent to South Vietnam as election observers, Young tried to beg off. He realized that the contrast between the “non-political” nature of his Urban League-sponsored trip to Vietnam the year before and the White House trip was too stark to miss. Every time he was pressed into service to speak for the administration it was a blow to Young’s credibility with the urban population he sought to help, thereby compromising the Urban League’s ability to meet its obligation to be the civil rights go-between. But when the President told Young that no matter what Young said he intended to announce him as a member of the delegation of election observers, leaving Young to try to explain to the press why “you feel you can’t serve your country,” there was no escaping Johnson’s arm-twisting.\textsuperscript{145}

Upon his return, Young attempted to re-cast the trip for Urban League purposes. Urban League press releases described the trip as an “opportunity to reassess the mood of the Negro GI’s in Vietnam.” According to Young, black GI’s knew all about urban unrest and “all the facts and figures of Negro participation in the Vietnam conflict.” Young cited the 66% Negro re-enlistment rate as proof that “the Negro has a better opportunity for training and advancement in the armed services than he has in the civilian economy, a bitter commentary on the state of our domestic affairs.”\textsuperscript{146} Young then pointed to the Urban League’s attempt to address the re-
enlistment crisis announced at the annual conference in Portland. The League’s Office of Veterans’ Affairs was a two-year demonstration project in eight major cities, New York, Washington, Chicago, Atlanta, Detroit, New Orleans, San Francisco, and Los Angeles financed primarily through a Rockefeller Foundation grant. Working in cooperation with the Department of Defense and Veterans Administration, the Veterans’ Affairs Offices sought to reduce the re-enlistment rate of black servicemen by showing them how to take advantage of GI Bill benefits as well as civilian opportunities.

Amazingly, just as with his trip to Vietnam the previous year, Young received only a single letter protesting the fact that he had permitted himself “to be exploited by the administration,” but this time there was more public sniping. Let recorded some of the backlash when it reported that when Young told a television reporter that he had also been an observer during elections in Mississippi and Alabama, “Deep South critics objected. None recalled Young traveling to the South ever to observe voting during elections.” The magazine also criticized the Justice Department, black organizations, and black elected officials for failing to lend their support to insure a fair and free election in Mississippi that fall. Given his frequent references to the Mississippi elections both during and immediately after his return, Young clearly would have preferred to be in Mississippi. Charles Evers shared Young’s view. The maverick Field Director of the Mississippi Branch of the NAACP sent the President a telegram stating that “We Negro citizens of Mississippi feel that inasmuch as you have seen fit to
send observers to Viet Nam to see that ‘fair and democratic elections’ are held... it would mean much more to America and particularly the 22 million Negroes who helped build this country if you would... send representatives from Washington and across the country to make certain that Negroes and Negro candidates are assured justice and fair play in all elections.”

After the summer of 1967 Young wasn’t the only member of the triumvirate under attack. Wilkins found that “Militants were after me all the time for one imagined crime after another.” Of course, Wilkins considered their criticism of his relationship with the White House “unfair,” “divorced from the actual record,” and “patently one sided” and concluded “There was nothing to do but wait them out. The board of the NAACP was behind me, and I got a good deal of moral support from old friends”—the most important of whom also happened to be the current President of the United States. Once Johnson advised Wilkins to call him a “sonofabitch” in order to maintain his credibility with the black community. Wilkins declined the offer, preferring instead to marvel that he had “come up so high in the world that the President of the United States was inviting me to give him a barnyard dressing down. It was the friendliest offer L.B.J. ever made me...”

But by the winter of 1968 the beleaguered President was feeling far less charitable. By the time he received the word that Minnesota Senator and peace candidate Eugene McCarthy would challenge him for the Democratic nomination, more than 485,600 U.S. military personnel were in Vietnam. There was little hope for the
passage of civil rights legislation in light of white backlash, urban riots, and the rise of "law and order" rhetoric. Both black and mainstream news magazines concluded that despite the reality of the crisis in urban America, there was "no will" in Congress to commit the resources "to do anything about the gut injustices that perpetuate poverty." Wilkins noted that despite "cheers for nearly everything, including a Beautiful America and the redwood trees, the congressional representatives had "not a handclap for Negro civil rights." At the end of the month the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese mounted a major offensive in three-fourths of the forty-four provincial capitals of South Vietnam and attacked the U.S. Embassy in Saigon in the process. Ten days later the weekly rate of U.S. soldiers wounded and killed in action reached an all-time high of over 3,000.

So when White House Aide Marvin Watson sent the President a press release from the Citizens' Crusade Against Poverty protesting White House budget cuts in the War on Poverty in late February, it was received by a very different President Johnson than the one who would have received it even a year before. The organization's letterhead listed, in addition to that of the chairman, UAW President Walter Reuther, the names of several Vice Chairmen, including several "Big Six" leaders, A. Philip Randolph, Roy Wilkins, Martin Luther King, Dorothy Height, and Whitney Young. According to Watson, the press release suggested that "the Administration may not really be serious about supporting basic anti-poverty programs, especially among poor children." Four days later Johnson sent domestic policy advisor Joe Califano a memo
instructing him to call Randolph, Young, and Wilkins among others to "tell them to cut
this stuff out."\footnote{158}

Given just the convergence of events in the four days between the receipt of the press release and his response, Johnson had every right to be in a bad mood. On the same day he received the Citizens' Crusade Against Poverty press release from Watson he also received a request from General Westmoreland to send 206,000 more troops to Vietnam. Later that night CBS evening news anchor Walter Cronkite, the most trusted man on television, told millions of viewers that after visiting Vietnam he believed that there was little chance Americans would ever win the war. Two days later Johnson received the report of his handpicked Kerner Commission, which concluded that the nation was moving toward two societies: one white and one black. Despite his best efforts, the Great Society had failed.

Just how direct the transfer of resources from the War on Poverty was to the War in Vietnam remains open to debate, but there is little doubt that the war had claimed the most important resource to the civil rights fight: the attention and skills of Lyndon Johnson.\footnote{159} The loss of an advocate of such prodigious energy who also, as Roy Wilkins explained, knew "where the bodies were buried, so to speak," was irreplaceable.\footnote{160} Looking back, Johnson's record, when compared to previous occupants of the White House, was unimpeachable. But by the beginning of 1967 the road ahead looked decidedly different. The administration was discovering that it had fewer resources to give to civil rights as the war diverted the attention of formerly
sympathetic whites who had grown tired of the movement, were exhausted by the war between the races, or were frightened by urban riots. And while the disproportionate casualty figures would fall in 1967 and the administration sought first to integrate, then ultimately abolish draft boards in favor of a lottery system, the damage had been done with respect to African American support for the war, which continued to decline as the war in Vietnam took its toll on the War on Poverty. By the spring of 1968, the Vietnam War, King's “demonic suction tube,” had consumed the Johnson presidency, the Great Society, and much of Johnson’s support right along with the civil rights movement.

On March 31, 1968 Lyndon Johnson announced that he had had enough. His health, his presidency, and his legacy in tatters, he withdrew from the 1968 presidential race. The conflict that had presented African Americans and moderate civil rights leaders with their “greatest dilemma since the post-World War I era” was finally drawing to a close. Four days later, on April 4, it ended with the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.
ENDNOTES


2 Patricia Roberts Harris, Oral History, LBJL, 45.


Ambassador to Iran Armin Meyer, Wilkins put in four very full days on behalf of the administration to counteract criticism of the U.S. in the wake of the King assassination. Memo for LBJ from Dean Rusk, April 26, 1968, and telegram from Armin Meyer for Ernest Goldstein, April 25 1968, Diary Back Up Files, Box 98, Folder: “Appointment File [Diary Back Up] 4/30/68,” LBJL.


13 Memo from Cliff Alexander to LBJ, January 11, 1967, WHCF, Box 145, Folder: “SP2-4/1967, 1/11/67-1/13/67,” LBJL. Memo from Cliff Alexander to LBJ, April 7, 1967, Name File, Martin Luther King, LBJL; Andrew Young also dates the break between King and the White House to January of 1967. See Andrew Young, Oral History, LBJL, 16.

14 While the rate of increase fell dramatically during this period Schneider contends that “aggregate spending on health, education, manpower training, community development, and housing,” increased dramatically such that the 1968 figure was 470 per cent greater than the total for the last Kennedy budget in 1964. James C. Schneider, “Guns versus Butter: Vietnam’s Effect on Congressional Support for the Great Society,” in The Foreign and Domestic Dimensions of Modern Warfare: Vietnam, Central America, and Nuclear Strategy, ed. Howard Jones (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988), 97.


18 Labor leader, A. Philip Randolph also supported the Wilkins’ position stating, “I am neither for nor against the war in Vietnam…. I am against plunging the civil rights movement into the controversy over the war. The most important front is the Alabama-Mississippi front.” Allan Morrison, “A. Philip Randolph Offers Civil Rights Plan,” Jet, July 6 1967, 17.

19 Louis Martin, Oral History, LBJL, 31; Andrew Young, Oral History, LBJL, 17-8.

20 O’Reilly, Racial Matters, 286; Weisbrot, Freedom Bound, 248

21 Despite the assertions of aides like Hobart Taylor’s that King felt the war “was morally wrong” and that King “was a preacher and a man of God,” David Garrow wrote “when one aide attempted to defend King’s sincerity on the issue of the war, Johnson reportedly replied, “God damn it, if only you could hear what that hypocritical preacher does sexually.” Hobart Taylor, Oral History, LBJL, 33; Garrow, The FBI, 167-8.

22 Memo to Robert Kinter from Fred Panzer, May 2, 1967, WHCF, Box 348, Folder: “PR 16, 4/12/67 – 5/20/67,” LBJL. On August 3 Marvin Watson forwarded to the President a memo written by Joseph Rauh, Jr. to the Americans for Democratic Action National Board which concluded that “Martin Luther King would be the strongest third party candidate and would probably add a substantial number of Negro votes to the million or so whites who would vote in protest against the war.” Memo from Marvin Watson to LBJ, August 2, 1967, WHCF, Box 227, Folder: “ND 19/CO 312, 7/29/67-8/18/67,” LBJL.

24 Memo from John P. Roche to LBJ, April 5, 1967, Confidential File, Box 150, Name File. Martin Luther King, LBJL. For more on the White House role in the creation of the Citizens Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam see Confidential File, Box 73, Folder: ND 19/CO 312, LBJL.


30 According to Halberstam, King’s antiwar activism “made the ghettos a little uneasy.” Halberstam, “The Second Coming,” 50.


32 Memo from Sherman Markman to LBJ, May 9, 1967, WHCF, Box 29, WE9 4/20/67-5/10/67, LBJL.

33 Cassius Clay (Muhammed Ali) refused the draft as a minister of the Nation of Islam and Harlem Congressman Adam Clayton Powell was censured by the House of Representatives. Memo from Stanford G. Ross to LBJ, May 9, 1967, WHCF, Box 29, WE9 4/20/67-5/10/67, LBJL.

34 Memo from Thomas E. Cronin to LBJ, May 31, 1967, WHCF, Box 29, Folder: WE9 5/11/67-6/14/67, LBJL.


38 Hamby, Liberalism and Its Challengers, 271.

39 Hamby, Liberalism and Its Challengers, 272; In a note to LBJ Marvin Watson concluded, based on a memo from Charles Weltner who had just completed a weeklong tour of six Midwestern states, that “the Vietnam issue” was not “the paramount problem in the midwest. Essentially, the people are with us when it comes down to whether we should stay in Vietnam or get out.” Note from Marvin Watson to LBJ, May 8, 1967 and memo from Charles Weltner to John Criswell, WHCF, Box 2, Folder: PL 4/1/67 - 7/31/67, 250
Memo from Clifford Alexander to Johnson, April 28, 1967, WHCF, Box 59, Folder: “H4 9/16/66-10/17/67,” LBJL. The Baltimore Afro-American also noted that despite the participation of King, Carmichael, and McKissick, “the participation of colored marchers was surprisingly small.” “I can’t be a silent onlooker while evil rages,’ says King,” Baltimore Afro-American, National Edition, 22 April 1967, 2.


Howard Schuman and Shirley Hatchett, Black Racial Attitudes: Trends and Complexities, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1974), 17, note 14; Howard Schuman, “Two Sources of Antiwar Sentiment in America,” American Journal of Sociology 78, 3 (November 1972), 529. Robert F. Burk noted that “national polls indicated that well over half of American blacks believed the draft unfair ... as early as August 1966” which, not coincidentally, coincided with the start of Project One Hundred Thousand. Burk, “Cold War, Limited War, and Limited Equality,” 74. Although nonwhites constituted less than 2 percent of all draft board members, 64% of eligible blacks were drafted whereas the figure for whites was only 31%. Jack D. Foner, Blacks and the Military in American History (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1974), 202-3.

The study also found that of those who qualified for service “only 5 per cent of Negroes can obtain deferment as college students, whereas 95 per cent of whites are so deferred. The result is an induction rate for Negroes about twice as high as for eligible whites.” “The Negro and Vietnam,” The Nation, July 17, 1967, 38.

A 1980 government study on Vietnam veterans admitted that “among those who served in Vietnam, those with less than high school educations were three times as likely to see heavy combat as were those with college educations. While minority Americans may have suffered a disproportionate share of the exposure to combat and combat fatalities, their suffering was the product not of racial discrimination, but of discrimination against the poor, the uneducated, and the young.” A population that remains, to this day, disproportionately black. U.S. House of Representatives, 96th Congress, 2d session, submitted by the Veterans’ Administration to the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs: Myths and Realities: A Study of Attitudes Toward Vietnam Era Veterans, Washington, D.C.: 1980, xli, 6-7. In February of 1967 White House Aide Clifford Alexander reported to the President that as of September 30, 1966, “Negroes constituted 10.2% of the Americans assigned to Vietnam. Negro fatalities from January 1, 1966 to November 30, 1966 were 16.3% of all deaths.” Memo from Clifford Alexander to LBJ, February 14, 1967, WHCF-HU2, Box 4,


Roy Wilkins, "LBJ and the Negro,” December 2, 1967, RWP, Box 39, S&WF, Folder: R&TS Newspaper Column Clippings, 1967-68, LOC. On May 26th Jack Valenti reported that Wilkins had made “a handsome speech” at a luncheon Valenti sponsored for him with the Hollywood community. Valenti added that Wilkins “told how you had done more than any other President in the assurance of human rights—and to my surprise—recounted how Jack Kennedy was totally stymied and his entire program foundering—and then President Johnson came in and gave such leadership that more was accomplished in a short time than ever before.” Memo from Valenti to LBJ, May 26, 1967, WHCF, Box 11, Folder: “SP/FG 1” LBJL.


63 Memo and attachment to Marvin Watson from John Criswell, April 24, 1967, WHCF, Box 49, Folder: SP/ND 19/CO312 11-1-66 - 5-5-67, LBJL.

64 When King echoed Stokely Carmichael’s claim that the U.S. government was using black soldiers as mercenaries, Wilkins deemed the assertion “hogwash.” Baltimore Afro-American, 29 April 1967, 16; Chicago Tribune, 20 April 1967, 1; Simeon Booker, “Ticker Tape U.S.A.,” Jet, September 8, 1966, 12; Memo and attachment to Marvin Watson from John Criswell, April 24, 1967, WHCF, Box 49, Folder: SP/ND 19/CO312 11-1-66 - 5-5-67, LBJL.

65 Simeon Booker, “Ticker Tape U.S.A.,” Jet, June 1, 1967, 12. Although it had focused on the students’ lack of courtesy and diplomacy, deeming the Howard demonstration the year before “insulting, disorderly and noisy,” the New Courier (Pittsburgh) reported in 1968 that “die-hard” governors like those in Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida were “persistent” in their failure to name more blacks to draft boards. “Draft Chief Heckled; Students Demonstrate,” Pittsburgh Courier, 1 April 1967, 1; “Draft Board Members Are Increasing,” The New Courier (Pittsburgh) 27 January 1968, 1.

66 Telegram to LBJ from Charles Evers, September 18, 1966, NAACP Field Director, Name File: Charles Evers, LBJL.

67 Press Release from NAACP Mississippi State Conference, NAACP, April 22, 1968, NAACP Papers, Part VI, Box C190, Folder: Branch Department, Staff Current, Glover B.; Memoranda 1963-69, LOC. It should be noted that Charles Evers, unlike his brother Medgar, was perceived as a bit of a ‘loose cannon’ within the NAACP organization.

68 Letter and memo from Lewis Hershey to Clifford Alexander, June 29, 1967, WHCF, Subject File, “General FG 282 [Selective Service], 2/10/67-1/1/68, Box 304, LBJL. Letter from Lewis Hershey to Marvin Davies and Joel Atkins, July 3, 1967, WHCF, Subject File, “General FG 282 [Selective Service], 2/10/67-1/1/68, Box 304, LBJL; Telegram, Letter and Resolution from Rutledge Pearson and Marvin Davies to LBJ, 2/13/67, and NAACP Resolution, 6/19/67, both WHCF, Subject File, “General, FG 282 [Selective Service], 2/10/67-1/1-68,” Box 304, LBJL.

69 Simeon Booker, “LBJ, Dr. King Tops in Negro Leadership Poll: Housing Key Area They Feel President Should Lend Support,” Jet, June 8, 1967, 14-8.


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73 Louis Martin, Oral History, LBJL, 2.

74 “LBJ Receives Citation From Publishers,” The New Courier (Pittsburgh), 1 April 1967, 1.


77 The anti-King editorial in the Atlanta Daily World caught the attention of Fulton County Clerk Frank R. Fling who sent it to the President pointing out that it had appeared in “a Negro paper.” Note and newspaper clipping from Frank Fling to LBJ, May 12, 1967, WHCF, Box 49, Folder: SP/ND 19/CO 312 5/6/67 – 10/31/67, “Fallacies In Dr. King’s Stand On the Vietnam War,” Atlanta Daily World, 4 May 1967, 4. For the 1965 rejection of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party’s support for draft resisters see “Stupid Move,” New York Amsterdam News, 14 August 1965, 14. The New Courier Pittsburgh had no trouble seeing the correlation since the April 1 issue included a political cartoon entitled “Spring Hair-do” depicting the War on Poverty programs as a girl having her long hair labeled “budget” being cut off by a barber labeled “Vietnam War.” The New Courier (Pittsburgh), 1 April 1967, 6. A similar cartoon in the Baltimore Afro American entitled “You’ll Have to Pardon My Reach, Bud” depicted the Vietnam war as a large Roman centurion, sitting behind a plateful of coins reaching past a small boy sitting at a table with an empty plate labeled “Great Society Programs to grab a second plate of coins.” Baltimore Afro-American, National Edition, 8 April 1967, 4.


79 Urquhart, Ralph Bunche, 388.

80 Urquhart, Ralph Bunche, 380-92; Garrow’s assessment is confirmed by Bunche biographer Brian Urquhart who wrote that Bunche “strongly disapproved of the United States’ involvement in Indochina from the very beginning, and as the war escalated... his exasperation and disgust increased.” Urquhart, Ralph Bunche, 380. Also see Charles Henry, Ralph Bunche: model Negro or American other? (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 236-7.


83 “Civil Rights in War and Peace: Statement of NAACP Board of Directors,” The Crisis (April 1967), 254

84 NAACP Papers, Group IV, Box A86, Folder: VWC, 1966-1969, LOC.


86 NAACP Papers, Group IV, Box A86, Folder: Vietnam War Correspondence, 1966-1969, LOC.


89 Letter from Stephen Wright to Roy Wilkins, April 11, 1967, NAACP Papers, Group IV, Box A86, Folder: VWC, 1966-1969, LOC.


91 Letter from Roy Wilkins to Daniel Davis, June 19, 1967, NAACP Papers, Vietnam War Correspondence 1966-1969, LOC.

92 According to White House aide Jim Jones, Mitchell was “appealing especially to his audience to bring their Congressmen back on the reservation as supporters of the President” and according to Mitchell the response had been good. Memo from Jim Jones to LBJ, October 18, 1967, Name File, Roy Wilkins, LBJL. Mitchell was also among the first to back Humphrey when Johnson withdrew from the race, Simon Booker, “Ticker Tape U.S.A.” Jet, May 7, 1968, 13 and May 16, 1968, 12-3.

93 Letter from Bishop Stephen Gill Spottiswood, Memo from Gloster B. Current to Miss Bobbie Branche, October 8, 1968, Note from Gloster B. Current to Field Staff, October 17, 1968, all three NAACP Papers, NAACP Papers, Group VI, Box C190, Folder: Branch Department, Staff: Current, Gloster B., Memoranda 1960-69, LOC. This partisanship became so pronounced in the Johnson years that Kenneth Clark publicly warned Wilkins about the dangers of becoming “vulnerable to the shrewd, psychological exploitation of skillful political leaders” in his quest to maintain a “posture of respectability.” Clark, “The Civil Rights Movement,” 250.


95 Letter to Roy Wilkins from Edward S. Ulman, no date, RWP, Box 41, S&WF, Folder: R&TS, Newspaper Column, Correspondence, Public Mail, 1968, LOC.

96 Letter from Bertram Harris, President of the Greenwich Village-Chelsea Branch of the NAACP, to Roy Wilkins, April 27, 1967, NAACP Papers, NAACP Papers, Group VI, Box C190, Folder: Branch

Although the article focused on convention challenges from three different delegations, The New York Times concluded that Roy Wilkins “appeared to have emerged from this convention stronger than ever. Even his opponents, who do not hesitate to express their sentiments in private, would not criticize the executive director in open session.” “Directors of NAACP Assailed By Units Critical of ‘Old Guard,” The New York Times, 13 July 1967, 9. Not a single mention of the war appears in The Crisis account of the 1968 convention.

Gloster B. Current, “The Turbulent 59th: An Exciting Convention,” The Crisis, August-September 1968, 226-38. The turbulence was presented as intergenerational conflicts revolving around attempts by small bands of dissidents to change established procedures and practices governing the introduction and adoption of policy resolutions.


Press Release, “Statement by Whitney M. Young, Jr., Executive Director, National Urban League made today (April 5) on Dr. Martin Luther King’s stand on Vietnam War,” April 5, 1967, Whutey M. Young Papers, Box 211, Folder: Vietnam, Columbia.


Nancy J. Weiss, Whitney M. Young, Jr. and the Struggle for Civil Rights (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 159; Halberstam, “The Second Coming,” 49. After he joined the antiwar movement, the administration made sure no more federal dollars would support King’s efforts in Chicago. Memo from Wilbur J. Cohen to LBJ, August 24, 1967, WHCF, Name File, Martin Luther King, LBJL.

Halberstam, “The Second Coming,” 49.

Later that evening King would call Young to apologize and the two men would talk for more than an hour. Weiss, Whitney M. Young. 159. Much later Young would admit, “I must confess I have changed somewhat in my own thinking now and feel maybe Dr. King was more right than probably I was, because it is hard to separate the war from the domestic problems in terms of resources of the country and of manpower and all this.” Whitney Young, Oral History, LBJL, 12-13.


Although Halberstam noted that “King’s people see Vietnam as an example of the difference, for they
believe that some high-level Negro acceptance of Vietnam is effected not because of agreement with the
Johnson Administration’s position, but as a price to pay in order to get other things from the


110 Andrew Young, Oral History, LB Jal, 19; According to Halberstam while “King’s people,” were
“privately very critical of both men [Wilkins and Young] they realize that both work through the white
Establishment to get things for Negroes... The white man is there, he owns 90 per cent of it, and the only
course is to work through his Establishment. King’s people privately feel that this is fine, but that the
trouble is the white Establishment has become corrupt, and in modeling yourself after it and working with it
and through it, you pick up the same corruptions.” Halberstam, “The Second Coming,” 40.

King, himself, had said as much in an interview with the New York Times just days before the Riverside
Church speech. See John Herbers, “Dr. King to Weigh Civil Disobedience If War Intensifies,” The New
1, 12.

112 Wyatt Tee Walker quoted in Halberstam, “The Second Coming,” 48; Mills Thornton quoted in Eagles,

113 Kenneth B. Clark, “The Civil Rights Movement: Momentum and Organization.” Daedalus 95 (Winter
1966), 241-2.

114 Whitney Young, Power Player,” Newsweek, 15 May 1967, 29; “The Other 97%,” Time, August 11,

115 Weiss, Whitney M. Young, 159; Young, “Separatism? We are Separated and That’s the Cause of All
Our Woes,” Ebony, August 1970, 94.

116 Although the Urban League made a point of repudiating the Black Power movement in 1966 because of
what Young called its “preoccupation with division and the consequent shift away from discussion of the
real problems of poverty and discrimination,” it would embrace the term by redefining it in 1968. Press
Release, Public Relations Department, National Urban League, Washington Bureau, Part I, Box 16, Folder:
NUJ Correspondence, W. M. Young, Jr. 1966-67; LOC; Tom Buckley, “Whitney Young: Black Leader or

32 (October 1984), 36. The Urban League’s income from outside sources continued to increase steadily
through 1968 then more than doubling from nearly 4 million to 8 million in 1969 then nearly doubling
again to 14 million in 1970.


32 (October 1984), 38, 40. Memo from Wilbur J. Cohen to LBJ, August 24, 1967, WHCF, Name File,
Martin Luther King, LBJL.

121 So as SNCC and CORE membership dwindled and they struggled to make payroll in 1967, the Urban League’s budget mushroomed to more than 3 million, and a national staff of 200, with nearly 9000 local paid and volunteer league staffers in over 80 affiliates nationwide administering foundation and government-funded projects totaling more than 20 million. "Whitney Young, Power Player," Newsweek, 15 May 1967, 28, "The Other 97%," Time, August 11, 1967, 14.

122 Urban League members understood well the radical flanking effect and, unlike the NAACP, lamented the demise of groups like CORE, SNCC and the SCLC. “Which Way the Negro,” Newsweek, May 15, 1967, 33 and Buckley, “Whitney Young,” 74.

123 Haines, Black Radicals, 95-96. In early 1968 Wilkins assured his Board of Directors that three-quarters of the general operating fund came from memberships. "This is a percentage to remember when next is heard that tired old fairy tale that the NAACP is supported by outsiders. The NAACP is supported by its membership, just as it has been since the Teens and Twenties. It is for this reason that the NAACP is able to speak its mind without giving ear to large donors, to the mood of the majority population or to any guiding ideology that may have insinuated itself into policy. Our policy is simply and solely the welfare of Negro American citizens and the removal by any legitimate means of all barriers to their full and equal exercise and enjoyment of their citizenship rights." The Crisis, February 1968, 48.

124 Louis Martin, a National Urban League vice president, reported that Vietnam was "the most controversial item" discussed at the convention, but noted that "forts to repudiate the position of the Urban League to concern itself primarily with domestic issues rather than international issues did not succeed." Instead Urban League delegates "supported the view that the country was affluent enough to have both guns and butter." Memo from Louis Martin to John Criswell, August 28, 1967, WHCF. Box 228, Folder: ND 19/03 312 8/19/67-9/10/67, LBJL.

125 Draft of Proposed Position Statement on International Involvement, NULP, Part III, Box 395, Folder No.1, Executive Office, General Counsel, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, 4-66-2/67, no date, LOC.


129 “The Other 97%,” Time, August 11, 1967, 17; Whitney M. Young, “Vietnam and Civil Rights,” To Be


133 Ibid, 43-4.


135 Ibid, 48.


140 Memo from James R. Jones to LBJ, Luncheon with publishers and Vietnam Election Observers in the State Dining Room of the White House, and Summary of the President's Meeting with News Publishers and Columnists and the Vietnam Election Observers, both September 6, 1967, WHCF, Box 81, Folder: "CO 312 9/6/67 - 9/21/67," LBJL. Memo from Jim Jones for the President, Meeting with Vietnam Election Observers in the Cabinet Room, and Meeting with Vietnam Election Observers with the President, both September 6, 1967, Folder "Appointment File [Diary Back up] September 6, 1967, Diary Back Up File, Box 75, LBJL.

141 Dallek, Flawed Giant, 400.

142 Memorandum for the Record, Civil Rights Meeting of February 13, 1967, February 15, 1967, Folder
"Appointment File [Diary Back up] February 13, 1967, Diary Back Up File, Box 55, LBJL. Martin Luther King was invited but did not attend. Wilkins did little more than compliment the president and pledge the NAACP’s continued support.


145 Weiss, Whitney M. Young, 162; Buckley, “Whitney Young,” 84; Whitney Young, Oral History, LBJL, 15.

146 Notes on Negro GIs in Vietnam prepared for Whitney M. Young, Jr., September 6, 1967, Whitney M. Young Papers, Box 8, Folder: South Vietnam Elections, Columbia. Memo from Clifford Alexander to LBJ, February 14, 1967, WHCF-HU2, Box 4, Folder: HU2 2/4/67-5/31/67, LBJL. An Associated Press wire service report explained that “the high proportion of Negro combat deaths in Vietnam is related to the high proportion of Negroes serving in fighting units. The number of Negroes in such units,” the wire continued, “is high….because Negroes enlist at much higher rates than whites…[and] volunteer more readily for elite combat units such as special forces and airborne divisions that offer more prestige and more pay [and] enter the service with more educational deficiencies, sharply limiting the number and type of armed service jobs available to them. “Negro Casualties,” February 18, 1967, WHCF-HU2, Box 4, Folder: HU2 2/4/67-5/31/67, LBJL.


152 Telegram from Charles Evers to LBJ, August 30, 1967, Charles Evers, Name File, LBJL.

153 Wilkins, Oral History, LBJL, 17; Wilkins, Standing Fast, 314-5.
Wilkins concluded that “getting out of the woods with the people who were calling me the country’s number-one Uncle Tom wasn’t worth the subterfuge.” Wilkins, Standing Fast, 330; Louis Martin, Oral History, LBJL, 32.

Simeon Booker, “Can Congress Avert Another Hot Summer? Observers Feel That Little Will Be Done in Civil Rights Area,” Jet, February 1, 1968, 14-7. “Racism Arrested,” The Christian Century, April 24, 1968, 507. This was the same conclusion reached by influential psychologist Kenneth Clark who, according to biographer Ben Keppel, “came to believe that, in the final analysis, most white Americans were insincere in their professed allegiance to racial equality, and that no authoritative disclosure about the rampant violence and want existing within the American ‘dark ghetto’ could alter this mind-set.” Keppel, The Work of Democracy, 10.

Wilkins also wrote that “Despite the intense flack over the war issue, President Johnson did not shy away from civil rights in this tough election year. It is the Congress and the shrill supporters of a crackdown who are shying away.” January 27, 1968 column, New York Post, Roy Wilkins Papers, Box 39, Speech and Writings File, Folder: “R&T Syndicate Newspaper Column, Clippings 1967-68,” LOC.

The National Urban League’s Office of General Counsel advised Young to “decline the honor” of being listed as a Vice Chairman of the Crusade based on the IRS audit of the League and Walter Reuther’s “perversant for running the whole show himself and his way.” Memo from Arthur Q. Funn to Whitney Young, September 15, 1966, NULP, Part III, Box 406, Folder 7, Executive Office, General Counsel, Young, Whitney M. Jr. 6-12-1966 (2 of 3), LOC.

Memo from Marvin Watson to LBJ, February 27, 1968, WHCF, Box 3, Folder: “WE 9 2/16/68 - 3/11/68”and Memo from LBJ to Joseph Califano, March 3, 1968, WHCF, Box 3, Folder: “WE 9 3/12/68 - 4/30/68,” LBJL.

Louis Martin, Oral History, LBJL, 41; Patricia Roberts Harris, Oral History, 44.

Roy Wilkins, Oral History, LBJL, 5.

In the spring of 1967 a presidential commission, the National Advisory Commission on Selective Service, released a report detailing a number of inequities in the administration of the draft including disproportionate casualty, assignment, and enlistment statistics, confirming the suspicions of African American regarding the unfairness of the draft. To his credit President Johnson reacted positively to the report declaring that “every principle of fairness, every tenet of our democratic faith, requires us to make our institutions representative of the people with whom they deal.” Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks to the State Directors of the Selective Service System,” PPP, 3 May 1967, 503; Neil Sheehan, “Johnson Discerns A Flaw in Draft,” The New York Times, 4 May 1967, 1.
CONCLUSION

"I WOULD HAVE SUPPORTED LYNDON JOHNSON AGAINST ANY":
AFRICAN AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR THE VIETNAM WAR IN THE JOHNSON
YEARS, 1965-1969

"He said, 'If I run, would you support me?' And I looked him right in the face, and
said, 'Bobby, if it was anybody else, I would. But I can't go against Lyndon Johnson,
because he's done too much for us.""¹
Charles Evers

"Kennedy versus Humphrey at the convention, I would have supported Humphrey.
After the convention, I would have had no trouble supporting Senator Kennedy.
I would have supported Lyndon Johnson against any.... no question about that.... With
what Lyndon Johnson had done in terms of reorientation of attitudes toward Negroes
in government alone, he merited my continuing support, and I would have supported
him.""²
Patricia Roberts Harris

"In the history of the civil rights movement and the movements it spawned for social
and economic equality, 1968 represented a critical turning point away from the
possibility of collective solutions to structural inequality.""³
William Chafe

"LBJ was the last president to offer committed leadership that challenged racial
injustice."
Steven Lawson

The night of November 19, 1968, just five days short of the fifth anniversary of
his first conversation with Whitney Young as president, Lyndon Johnson made a
surprise appearance at the National Urban League's Equal Opportunity Day Dinner.
He had spoken at the event once before in 1962 as a frustrated vice president. So it
was particularly ironic that he would return to the event in much the same emotional
state despite his many accomplishments in the intervening years. During his
presidency the once-in-a-lifetime convergence of a sympathetic Congress, a supportive Supreme Court, and a powerful, pro-civil rights president in the mid-1960’s had resulted in the achievement of a century-old agenda of legislative, judicial, and social gains for African Americans. And yet looking back on the turbulent year drawing to a close, Johnson reminded those who might be “inclined—after these years of struggle and success in winning legal rights for all Americans—to rest for a while, [to] consider where you are resting.” For despite the progress he had made in trying to “keep America moving toward… a just and prosperous nation where opportunity is open to all,” the country seemed locked in a cycle of violence at home and abroad that threatened to define its future for years to come. Despite his obvious shortcomings, Johnson promised the more than 2000 assembled “for as long as I live, I shall remain joined with you in fighting for that right to opportunity.” Later Young remembered that “there was hardly a dry eye in the place; there were no boos, there was nothing but enthusiastic cheers. It gave us a real opportunity to say ‘Thanks’ for what we all feel has been the greatest leadership job in civil rights done by any President.”

Even before he officially left office it seemed that there was a growing sense among many African Americans that the Johnson presidency had been a unique and unprecedented opportunity for civil rights progress. For even as a “lame duck” with his health, credibility, and presidency in tatters, Johnson still had the power, and more importantly the will, to do what other presidents would not on behalf of civil rights. In
the wake of the riots following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., he had fought and won one final civil rights victory, in the words of his domestic aide Joseph Califano, “to kindle the hope... that the system can respond to those in need.” Califano explained that “from the tragedy of King’s assassination, Johnson [had seen] the opportunity to salvage a national fair housing bill—and he was prepared to use the tragedy to get it.” When Congress passed the 1968 civil rights bill that included the Fair Housing Act that Johnson had originally proposed in 1966, Roy Wilkins contrasted Johnson’s 1968 pursuit of fair housing with that of his predecessor: While “Kennedy advisors were weighing... the Negro vote in the North against the possible dissident white vote in the South,” Wilkins wrote, “Johnson, ... in effect ... said, ‘Damn the torpedoes. Full steam ahead.’ ... [H]e knew that he either had the votes or he didn’t ... but he wasn’t going to retreat on it.”

Yet by the time Johnson spoke at the Urban League dinner there was little doubt that a retreat was exactly what his newly-elected successor had in mind. As a presidential candidate, Nixon claimed to speak for a “silent majority” who valued “law and order” more than opportunity and equality. His “southern strategy” to win the presidency had succeeded by pitting ethnic groups against each other, as well as black against white, and young against old, and by tapping into the fears and prejudices of white Americans. Upon becoming president Nixon immediately sought to roll back Great Society social welfare programs, school desegregation, and voting rights enforcement. Comparing Richard Nixon with Lyndon Johnson on civil rights in November 1968 spoke volumes about why the NAACP and the National Urban
League had deemed criticism of the war during the Johnson years a “tactical error.”

The election of Nixon, the smoothing out of disproportionate induction and casualty rates by the lottery, and the discovery that the military was not the racial utopia it claimed to be, in the words of antiwar scholar David Levy, “evaporated any lingering loyalty to the White House” African Americans may have felt in the late 1960s. Less than a year after Johnson left the White House, the percentage of African Americans supporting withdrawal from Vietnam skyrocketed to 50 per cent compared with only a third of whites despite the essential continuity in U.S. policy in Vietnam. The end of the Johnson administration brought an end to most African American support for the Vietnam War.

This was even true among black soldiers who had been among the most loyal and vocal supporters of the effort. Journalist Wallace Terry and military historian James Westheider found that the attitudes of black soldiers regarding the war began to change and the number of racial incidents increased in Vietnam after 1968. Both Terry and Westheider attributed the change to events at home, particularly urban riots, the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy, and the rise of black pride. Terry, who had personally informed President Johnson that black soldiers had named five loyal Johnson supporters as their top five African American leaders in 1967, filed a very different report with Time magazine after a six-month stint in Vietnam in 1969. Roy Wilkins, who had been second on the 1967 list after General Benjamin O. Davis was now a “‘uniform tango’—military phonetics for U.T. or Uncle Tom.” And Senator Edward Brooke, who came in fifth because after visiting
Vietnam he had switched his position from moderate dove to moderate hawk, was now deemed an “oreo.” In addition Terry concluded that 60 per cent of the more than four hundred black enlisted personnel he interviewed believed that African Americans had no stake in the Vietnam War.12

What was true of the African American masses and soldiers was also true of their leaders. Many of the same individuals who had defended the war and attacked King for his criticisms in the Johnson years turned against it during the Nixon administration, most often citing the country’s failure to make progress on the domestic agenda. Jackie Robinson, a lifelong Republican, wrote, “I cannot accept the idea of a black supposedly fighting for the principles of freedom and democracy in Vietnam when so little has been accomplished in his country. There was a time when I deeply believed in America. I have become bitterly disillusioned.”13 Another Republican, Senator Edward Brooke, who had been elected as a dove but supported Johnson administration policies in Vietnam, returned to his dove roots to oppose the war under Nixon. And in October 1969, Whitney Young came out against the war admitting that “Dr. King was more right” than he had been about the nation’s inability to commit fully to a war on poverty while fighting in Vietnam.14

By now it seemed that just about everyone realized that King had been “more right.” The war in Vietnam was “a demoniacal destructive suction tube.” And by 1967 the war would claim both the civil rights movement and the Johnson presidency as victims. After coming out against the war, CORE and SNCC began to self-destruct, torn apart by internal strife and the loss of financial support. Commenting on their
demise, an Urban Leaguer remarked joylessly, "The Movement is back where it
began. It's us and the NAACP."\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Newsweek} also quoted a "moderate elder," most
likely Bayard Rustin, lamenting that "the tragedy is not that King is going to the peace
issue but that he's leaving civil rights. Instead of providing the inspirational
leadership, the magnetism, he's diverting energy and attention from the basic
problems of poverty and discrimination."\textsuperscript{16} Meanwhile Patricia Roberts Harris, the
first African American female to serve as a U.S. ambassador, offered a similar
observation regarding the President who had selected her:

\begin{quote}
I think that the war in Vietnam so claimed the
President's attention that he was unable to mobilize
community support for the kind of action that was
necessary to deal with domestic problems. Unlike most
people, I am not unhappy about the war because it takes
money. I'm unhappy because it takes attention.... We
really did need a kind of continuing statement or
continuing commitment of a very high order to dampen
down the hysteria of the black separatists and the
violence purveyors. And also to say to white people,
' Don't be frightened; ... We're going to do something
for Negroes but we're not going to take something away
from you.' ... when he wanted to address himself to this,
he was very good.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

The irony of African American opinion on the war during the Johnson
administration was that despite the increased divisions and bitterness caused by the
Vietnam War, advancement of civil rights was the single pivot upon which African
American opinion turned. So when a black war supporter like A. Philip Randolph
wrote, "having long experience in the field of mass movements, I am aware that you
cannot fight on two fronts at the same time without sacrificing one," a war opponent
like Martin Luther King, Jr. would have been the first to agree.\textsuperscript{18} The difference was
that Randolph believed that the civil rights movement could not fight effectively against the war in Vietnam and for the War on Poverty simultaneously. King, on the other hand, argued that the country could not fight a war in Vietnam and a war against poverty simultaneously. Only when Lyndon Johnson no longer occupied the Oval Office did a majority of African Americans conclude that King was right, that the possibility of both guns and butter was merely an illusion.

There was great irony in the fact that the president who had demonstrated a commitment to civil rights unmatched by any of his predecessors had also done the most to contribute to its demise. He left the movement rudderless and adrift by delivering the legislation it sought when it had no agreed upon secondary agenda. He sanctioned the abuses of the FBI’s counterintelligence program that nurtured the seeds of distrust and disunity within the movement. And by escalating the Vietnam War he removed the resources necessary to fight the war on poverty and shifted the energies and focus of civil rights activists, his own included, to the war, delivering the final blow to an already fragmented civil rights movement. That said, it seems appropriate to return to the questions introduced at the beginning of this study.

Were the positions taken by the NAACP and Urban League on the Vietnam War indicative of a leadership so out-of-touch with African American opinion on the war that these organizations provide little insight into African American views on the Vietnam War in the Johnson years? No. Though largely unexplored or dismissed by antiwar historians and misinterpreted by journalists unfamiliar with African American history and seduced by the rhetoric of articulate antiwar activists, the positions taken
by the NAACP and Urban League represented the views of a significant segment of African American opinion during the Johnson years.

While no one or even two organizations could speak for every African American, among the civil rights organizations of the 1960s, the Urban League and the NAACP together had as broad a base of support as any of the “Big Five” civil rights organizations. Unlike SNCC with its membership mainly of college students or SCLC that was run primarily by southern ministers, the NAACP, with its youth and college chapters, connections to black churches and fraternal organizations, and dues structure that invited wide participation by persons at all income levels, could claim participation from a wide swath of the African American community. The Urban League brought together the black professional class and white business leaders to provide services to the black working class. As chapters three and four demonstrate through polling data, newspaper editorials and accounts, and archival evidence from both the NAACP and Urban League files, these organizations were very much in step with much of the African American community opinion regarding the war during the Johnson years.

The dividing point seems to have been when the expression of this support involved personal attacks against other civil rights leaders and organizations. As the letters written to the NAACP in 1967 and the transcripts of the Urban League delegate assembly discussions indicate, there was as much concern about divisions within the movement caused by differing opinions on the war as there was over support for the war itself. Of course, warring factions within the civil rights movement was nothing
new. In fact it was as old as the movement itself, dating back to a split between Du Bois and Booker T. Washington at the turn of the century. But the early 1960s had brought an unprecedented display of public unity that had brought unprecedented progress. Expectations of continued progress through unity remained high if unrealistically so. But as T. Harry Williams noted, this was, at least in part, a consequence of Johnson’s over-blown rhetoric.

To what degree did the Johnson White House orchestrate African American support for the war in the Johnson years? As the introduction and chapter one explain, African American support for the Vietnam War was born of an amalgamation of perceptions related to the civil rights-presidential relationship, and the economic and social benefits resulting from war mobilization and military service, as well as an assessment of current domestic and foreign policy. Like the civil rights movement and Vietnam War that defined the Johnson presidency, African American support for the war in Vietnam in the Johnson years had its roots in the 1940s. Black World War II veterans, many of whom were at the forefront of the civil rights movement of the 1950s, supported the Vietnam War in the 1960s based on what they believed would be an even better opportunity for discipline, vocational and leadership training, and postwar benefits than they had received. Other African Americans remembered that the demands of war and international scrutiny finally had led to civil rights progress under Roosevelt and Truman. Many African Americans hoped that, like World War II, the Vietnam War would increase their economic opportunities at home. At the time
these prospects certainly appeared much better than those offered by ghettos full of unemployment, crime, violence, and drugs.

When African American protest finally appeared it was largely due to the fact that few of these expectations appeared to be coming true, not out of solidarity with the Vietnamese people. The evidence suggests that African Americans supported the war because they made a strategic decision to "dance with the girl that brung 'um" on civil rights no matter how badly she behaved internationally. With the benefit of distance we see that King, Ali, and Carmichael were the exceptions, not the rule in the 1960s. African Americans, as a whole, were no more for or against Vietnam than they were for any other war given their general isolationism when it came to U.S. foreign policy overall.

This does not mean that the White House didn't welcome and encourage their support; only that they didn't manufacture it. The most violent attacks on antiwar advocates came from Wilkins, who needed no prompting. His acerbic personality, personal and professional jealousy of King, compulsion to protect the status of the NAACP and himself at the forefront of the civil rights movement, well-known "fondness for combat with other Negro organizations," and desire to impress whoever was the current occupant of the Oval Office would have led him to do so anyway. Similarly while Louis Martin was very busy using his contacts to make sure that black newspaper editors supported the administration rather than King the trail begins and ends with Martin. Despite the King camp's suspicion that Johnson was pulling the strings there is no indication that Martin wasn't simply doing his job as Deputy Chair
of the Democratic National Committee and out of his own individual sense of loyalty to a Democratic president. Martin’s actions with regard to the war seem little different from his efforts to get positive press in black newspapers for Johnson generally as he had for Kennedy before him. Vietnam was just one more page in Louis Martin’s portfolio, alongside his efforts to ensure the smooth operation of the 1966 White House conference on Civil Rights, his suggestion to create the prowar Citizens Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam, and his support for an initiative like Project 100,000. This is also not to claim that the Johnson White House was above manufacturing support. It carried out Martin’s suggestion to create the Citizens Committee for Peace with Freedom in Vietnam. Only that with respect to the African American community “marshalling” seems to be a more accurate word choice than “manufacturing.”

While it appears that the NAACP and Urban League response to the war mirrored a broad cross section of an African American community that valued civil rights progress over antiwar protest, it would be naïve not to acknowledge that some degree of personal self-interest factored into Young and Wilkins’ support. Direct access to the President of the United States is a rare commodity enjoyed by a select few African Americans. And it clearly served Wilkins’ aristocratic pretensions and Young’s professional ambitions. Young’s relationship with the President certainly didn’t hurt when the Urban League was trying to set up meetings with corporate CEO’s or, as Wilkins’ editor noted, when attempting to get a syndicated newspaper column in the Washington Post. In addition, the NAACP and Urban League
leadership received numerous federal appointments and substantial government support that translated into even greater access to and support from corporate and philanthropic sources during the Johnson years. And as stewards of their respective organizations, Wilkins and Young possessed a fiduciary duty to act in their long-term best interest. Both men knew, perhaps better than most, that Lyndon Johnson would be a dangerous opponent imminently capable of utterly destroying those he perceived to be his enemies.

But their support was neither a betrayal of the larger African American community nor the latest example of civil rights leaders turning their backs on international issues in order to gain civil rights concessions from another Democratic administration. For in reality there was little international vision to speak of at either organization in the 1960s. There was nothing in Young’s or the Urban League’s history to indicate a sustained interest in international matters. And attempts to involve the League in such matters were always uncomfortable for the League and for Young. A clear example was Young’s response to both A. Philip Randolph’s invitation to join the Committee of Conscience Against Apartheid in 1966 and Dr. Benjamin Spock’s request that the Urban League join the list of sponsors for the June 1965 SANE “Rally for Peace in Vietnam.” Young wrote Randolph that while “there is no question in my mind, concerning the viciousness of the South African policy of apartheid or the need for a change,” he was obligated not to “take part in projects … which the National Urban League, as an agency, could not sponsor and take part in itself.” And he had offered the same explanation to Spock the year before writing, “I am afraid the
National Urban League will not be able to be among the supporting organizations.

Our Board has taken the position that... it is best to restrict sponsorship and participation to those areas directly related to the objectives and goals of the Urban League."^{22}

As chapter two illustrates the same was true of the NAACP under Roy Wilkins' leadership, despite its rich internationalist history under White. Wilkins had no international agenda for the NAACP. To do so would have played to the strengths of his competitors and expanded civil rights into matters that fell outside of his personal purview and control. Wilkins had neither the experience, intellect, knowledge, nor interest in foreign policy to continue the NAACP's international legacy defined by Du Bois’ genius and White’s vision. There is little indication that Wilkins ever had an international vision separate from White’s.^{23} So while Wilkins was adept at following White's lead in international matters to protect his own career aspirations, he clearly did not have the intellectual capital to sustain it once White died. Truthfully, few Americans of any race were as sophisticated as Du Bois or White regarding international affairs. The activists in the 1960s who claimed to speak for ghetto dwellers by railing against the war's racist, imperialist objectives were privileged college students, Du Bois' talented tenth, far more intellectual than their ghetto counterparts. African Americans, as a whole, with the possible exception of veterans and the highly educated, were much more like Wilkins in their limited experiences and vision regarding international matters.
When African Americans turned against the war it was due to its domestic consequences: the unfairness of the draft, the mounting casualties among black soldiers, and the draining effect the Vietnam War was having on the war on poverty, consequences that were not immediately apparent. Although Wilkins and Young may have had more information about his commitment to civil rights than the average African American in November 1963, Lyndon Johnson had already demonstrated his willingness to go further than any of his predecessors on behalf of civil rights by the time of the military escalation in 1965. In response, the civil rights community deliberately pushed away any sort of association with the antiwar movement and silenced any criticism of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia in 1965 because it neither represented the concerns of African Americans nor the interests of the civil rights movement. And in 1966 the movement’s preoccupation with the first manifestations of the Black Power movement and the power struggle for the direction of the movement overrode concerns about the Vietnam War. And despite the fact that African Americans, as a whole, were more isolationist in their foreign policy views than the general population, and therefore less supportive of military interventions of any kind, three out of four African Americans still supported administration policies in Southeast Asia immediately after Martin Luther King joined the antiwar movement in April 1967. This shared vision of the Johnson presidency as one that had done more, and would do more, for civil rights than any of its predecessors far outweighed any critique of U.S. foreign policy for most African Americans.
Were the issues of the Vietnam War and civil rights truly separate in the minds of most African Americans of the day? Yes and No. For African Americans the war posed a significant threat to the completion of the Great Society but ultimately it was not enough of a justification to oppose a president who had done more for them than any other. Whatever their misgivings about the war, their support for Lyndon Johnson would remain until he no longer needed it. Even those who turned against the war acknowledged his accomplishments on civil rights and the fact that the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam conflict was not entirely of Johnson's own making. James Farmer said,

I think in the period between November '63... until early '65 Johnson's record on civil rights was excellent -- the best of any President so far. There's just no question about that at all. ...I have grave questions that Kennedy could have gotten the civil rights act through intact. But Johnson did, and he fought to get it through.... he wanted to go down in history as a person who really accomplished something in civil rights for blacks.... I did feel though... about '65 the President changed, not his feelings, but his priorities. And I now think that one basic cause of that was that agonizing decision to send troops into Viet Nam...."24

Were specific benefits or rewards anticipated by or promised to civil rights leaders who supported U.S. policy in Southeast Asia? While no specific rewards appear to have been promised, civil rights leaders, like everyone else, realized that Lyndon Johnson was extremely capable when it came to rewarding his friends and punishing his enemies. This was partly due to the President's excellent relationship with J. Edgar Hoover, whom he exempted from mandatory retirement. But it was also due to Johnson's ability to wield power. The ongoing campaign of surveillance and
harassment against Dr. King gained more momentum and justification when King joined the antiwar movement. And the White House saw to it that no more federal dollars supported King efforts after 1967. It was not a path other civil rights leaders wanted to follow.

Instead, as civil rights historian Nancy Weiss noted, support from white leaders gave the NAACP and the Urban League “access to and some influence with the white political, economic, and social establishment that held the power to change significantly the way in which American blacks were being forced to live.”

Specifically, support from whites gave,

the NAACP easy access to the ears of public officials and the pages of influential newspapers and journals; [and] it enabled the Urban League to gain a hearing from major employers, union leaders, community chests, and local, state and federal government officials and agencies. Moreover, important white endorsement gave the organizations’ work (which was, in the context of the times, both controversial and, in the case of the NAACP, radical) a stamp of respectability and credibility and a chance for success that it would not otherwise have had.

Ironically, Weiss was writing about the NAACP and Urban League of the Progressive era. But fifty years later the rewards were essentially the same.

Sociologist Herbert Haines documented that the National Urban League “received a late-1960s windfall that was nothing less than astounding…[not] merely a case of a fixed amount of outside money being reallocated among a fixed number of recipients. On the contrary, there was a vast increase in total outside funding as well as a greater concentration of resources in the coffers of two moderate organizations…. the
radicalization of some factions of the civil rights movement increased the total amount of outside financial contributions in a variable-total manner. Yet the most explosive increases occurred during the Nixon administration after Young had come out against the war and not solely from federal sources.

What Haines fails to factor into his analysis of radicalization is opposition to the war. According to Haines it was black power and the riots, "enlightenment" from the glow of burning cities that caused a portion of the nation's corporate elite to recognize that it had a crucial interest in pacifying the black population, particularly in the volatile cities, and in accommodating certain manageable black demands after years of indifference to nonviolent cajoling by the National Urban League and the NAACP. Haines also asserts that by speaking out against the war Martin Luther King, Jr. caused a drop off in the SCLCs income. Yet he does not make the converse observation that the two civil rights organizations that stuck with LBJ and criticized King for failing to do so saw the most financial gains in the late 1960s or that the government's campaign against King began long before he joined the antiwar movement.

Were these benefits shared by the African American community? The fact that the purposes of the Urban League and NAACP were to uplift black people legally, socially, and economically meant that their success benefited the African Americans as a whole. Although he considered rioting a personal betrayal, President Johnson also recognized that black leaders, with the exception of King, continued to support him as did black voters. If, as critics claim, the Urban League and NAACP
represented only the interests of the black middle class then their good fortune was
shared with their constituency because there is clear evidence that “the war on poverty
did make a difference.” The number of blacks living in poverty declined from over 40
per cent in 1959 to nearly 20 percent in 1968. The proportion of black families
earning more than $10,000 a year grew from 13 per cent in 1960 to 31 per cent by
1971. The median number of school years for blacks increased from 10.7 in 1960 to
12.2 by 1970 only .5 per cent less than that for whites. Black family income rose to 60
per cent of white family income by the end of 1968 compared to only 54 per cent in
1965. The percentage of black families earning under $3,000 fell from 41 per cent in
1960 to 23 per cent in 1968. Unemployment among non-white married men was less
than half of what it was in 1963.29

What were the consequences of such support? The consequence of such
support has been for Wilkins and Young to be written off by militants in the 1960s and
civil rights and antiwar historians ever since as conservatives, sycophants and
cowards, while their supporters were made invisible. In particular Young is rarely
given credit for his early advocacy of affirmative action (what he called compensatory
action) by civil rights historians. In their rush to dismiss the Urban League, they too
often confuse non-confrontational tactics with the pursuit of conservative goals. For
example William Chafe incorrectly credits Bayard Rustin, the author of the 1966
Freedom Budget, with Young’s 1963 Domestic Marshall Plan. And David Southern
claims that until Martin Luther King, Jr.’s 1964 Bill of Rights for the Disadvantaged,
“the movement did not concern itself with affirmative action but with legal equality
and equal opportunity” when, in fact, in the words of civil rights chronicler Robert Penn Warren, King’s bill was simply “another name for Whitney Young’s Marshall Plan for Negroes.”

So despite the fact that Young still enjoyed the support of African American civic organizations and community groups like the Links, the Elks, sororities, fraternities, and black churches and that Wilkins would remain at the helm of an organization whose membership never dipped below 400,000 throughout his tenure, their support is considered anomalous to the sentiments of the African American community.

Even more thoughtful historians like Steven Lawson have concluded that “One consequence for black leaders such as Wilkins, Young and Randolph who identified so closely with Johnson was that the relationship narrowed the limits within which they might disagree with the White House.” But their field of criticism was narrow to begin with even before the war. Wilkins admittedly “loved LBJ” and his relationship with him and his narrow definition of civil rights would never have permitted the inclusion of matters related to foreign policy for fear of empowering King and raising the communist specter. Young continued to criticize the administration regarding the things that mattered to him but like most African Americans Vietnam wasn’t really one of them until it became clear that it was having a negative impact on the war on poverty. Young never let up on the inadequacy of War on Poverty programs to address the far-reaching needs of poor black communities.
Finally, and perhaps most importantly, were mainstream civil rights leaders like Bayard Rustin, A. Philip Randolph, Roy Wilkins, and Whitney Young, Jr., their organizations, and a significant segment of the African American population right to stick with Johnson on Vietnam? It is not hard to understand why the civil rights leadership and the Johnson White House would want to establish a close working relationship in November 1963. Civil rights leaders seized the opportunity finally to get the legal protections they had been seeking for more than a half-century. And Wilkins would gain the support of powerful liberals who had thwarted his own challenge to his predecessor at a time when Wilkins himself was being challenged not only for leadership of the NAACP but when the NAACP was also being challenged for leadership of the movement. Johnson had similar personal motivations. By proving himself more liberal than Kennedy he believed he would gain the breathing room he sought from Kennedy liberals who had thwarted his efforts to become the Democratic presidential nominee in 1960. And by passing civil rights legislation he believed he would get the “southern monkey” off his back and bragging rights from those who thought him both conservative and unworthy. Young got access to both power and capital to raise the Urban League’s national profile as a relevant organization and to fund Urban League programs. And the Johnson White House understood that the social, economic, and political status of African Americans would either, in the words of Secretary of State Dean Rusk, “serve to counteract the communist propaganda that Americans are guilty of race discrimination” or become “the biggest burden [Americans] carry... in our foreign relations.” Yet the tragedy is
that by 1968 the reasons for the alliance hardly mattered. The Johnson presidency, the 
civil rights movement, the Great Society, and the War on Poverty were all in 
shambles, victims of the demise of a brief liberal consensus on civil rights that began 
to fade at the instant that it had burned brightest. The Vietnam War was merely the 
final coups de grace.\textsuperscript{36}

By attempting to correct the widespread assumption that African Americans 
were either uniformly against the war or mere sycophants of Lyndon Johnson, it is 
hoped that this study will make an important contribution to the Vietnam, Cold War, 
and civil rights historiographies and encourage other scholars in diplomatic, Cold War, 
African American, and modern U.S. history to recognize the fertile ground for further 
research created by the intersection of the civil rights movement and the war in 
Vietnam. This study does not purport to be the definitive story of African American 
support for the war in Vietnam. While it has focused primarily on the leadership and 
constituencies of the NAACP and the National Urban League, the two largest, oldest, 
most moderate, and arguably, most effective civil rights organizations, future studies 
on this topic will necessarily include records from local NAACP and Urban League 
chapters, military records, archival records from other “Big Five” organizations, as 
well as from other significant organizations in the African American community like 
fraternities, sororities, lodges, black colleges, and churches. In addition, scholarly 
biographies of Louis Martin and Roy Wilkins written by trained historians are 
desperately needed to replace the nominally useful existing sources. This is especially 
true in the case of Wilkins, a pivotal figure for whom the only published source is an
autobiography riddled with errors, omissions, and revisions of his personal history and relationships.

Future studies may also seek to draw a more in-depth comparison with other members of the New Deal coalition like labor that also supported the war during the Johnson years and suffered from similar divisions within its ranks because of it. In his biography of UAW President Walter Reuther, labor historian Nelson Lichtenstein found that Reuther, like Young and Wilkins, “remained clearly in Johnson’s camp even as the nation’s polarization over Vietnam made such an alliance one of dubious remuneration.”37 Also like Wilkins and Young, Reuther appears to have done so largely because of Johnson’s unprecedented commitment to a progressive domestic social agenda and the unprecedented level of direct interaction he enjoyed with the President. In addition Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) founding member, labor lawyer Joseph Rauh urged anti-war, liberal Democrats in the fall of 1967 to shun the “dump Johnson” movement because it “would fracture the liberal-labor-Negro coalition that has elected every liberal President and made possible every liberal advance since the 1930s.” According to Rauh, campaigning against Johnson would only complete the separation begun by the war and the black power movement.38 Clearly Rauh’s assertion is based on the assumption that labor and African Americans, the other members of the coalition, would continue to support the President and not just because they were loyal Democrats which would be true of ADA members as well. This is a fertile area of research that has only been partially mined by Rhodri

Clearly, upon closer inspection, the reality of African American opinion on the Vietnam War was much more complex than it has previously been portrayed. Martin Luther King’s view that the only way to save the War on Poverty was to force an end to the war thereby restoring the attention and the resources of the administration to the domestic struggle was not the only view. In fact it was rather unique since as a religious leader and scholar King linked the two wars as a matter of morality. Meanwhile longtime activists like Wilkins understood that when civil rights leaders addressed foreign policy matters in the Cold War era they empowered their enemies to raise the communist specter over the movement, distancing it from much-needed support of the federal government and other powerful friends. And, in the case of Wilkins in particular, the inclusion of such matters also stretched the boundaries of the movement beyond his limited vision and, more importantly, his control. But Wilkins’ limited vision was shared by many African Americans who were, in the main, more isolationist than whites. For Young, the war on poverty and the war in Vietnam were linked as a matter of practicality. Young believed that the only way to save the War on Poverty was to support the administration despite the war because civil rights leaders were not in a position to re-shape U.S. foreign policy and it would be impossible to criticize the president in one moment and ask for resources in the next. It was more about political realities and less about moral imperatives. Since he didn’t have the power to stop the war maybe he could use the conflict to the movement’s advantage,
to save the declining War on Poverty. Adopting Young's perspective, the administration attempted initiatives like Project 100,000. But King's vision won out with Congress and the American people who made the hard choice, choosing guns over butter, especially when the butter was perceived to be of benefit to black people.

While personal and professional rivalries and histories clearly influenced the tone of the debate over the war whether it was taking place at the NAACP headquarters or in a Harlem bar, the focus, whatever their position on the war, was civil rights progress, as they individually defined it, and it would remain so for the African American community. And on that subject, for African Americans, Lyndon Johnson had, and still has, no peer.
ENDNOTES

1 Charles Evers, Oral History, LBJL, 8.

2 Patricia Roberts Harris, Oral History, LBJL, 43-4.

3 William Chafe “One Struggle Ends,” 137.

4 Lawson, “Mixing Moderation,” 82.


6 According to Califano, Johnson would use the same logic to seek gun control legislation after the assassination of Robert Kennedy. Califano, Triumph and Tragedy, 276, 304.

7 Roy Wilkins Oral History, LBJL, 9.

8 David, W. Levy, The Debate over Vietnam (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 111. Wilkins, Robinson, Young, and Brooke all opposed the war within months of Nixon taking office.


10 Referring to the King and Kennedy assassinations, one soldier explained: “They were trying to help the brothers—you see what that got them.” Wallace Terry, “Black Power in Vietnam,” Time, 19 September 1969, 22.


13 Robinson and Duckett, I Never Had It Made, 227.


15 “Which Way For The Negro,” Newsweek, May 15, 1967, 33. Of course, this would not have been Roy Wilkins’ view. He would have been overjoyed to find the NAACP without any competition since he was convinced all the other groups were created to dethrone the NAACP, the only true civil rights organization.


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17 Patricia Roberts Harris, Oral History. LBJL., 44-45.


19 For Wilkins’ kowtowing in the 1958 meeting with President Eisenhower see L.D. Reddick, “Martin Luther King and the Republican White House,” in Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Profile, ed. C. Eric Lincoln (New York: Hill and Wang, 1970), 80-1; For meetings with John Kennedy see Simeon Booker, Black Man’s America (Englewood Cliff, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), 24-5. For Wilkins’ “fondness for combat with other Negro organizations” see Moore, The Search for Equality, 101; Garrow, “FBI Harassment,” 12; Branch, Parting the Waters, 50; Farmer, Lay Bare, 189-90; Clark, “The Civil Rights Movement,” 250.


21 In 1967 Young told Newsweek magazine that ten years earlier Urban League leaders “used to wait six months to see an assistant to the assistant personnel director.” Now, the magazine noted, “the men at the top—IBM’s Thomas Watson, Ford’s Henry Ford II, AT&T’s H.I. Romnes, Kiser Industries’ Edgar Kaiser—were] no farther than Young’s push-button telephone.” “Whitney Young, Power Player,” Newsweek, 15 May 1967, 28. The manager of Wilkins’ syndicated newspaper column suggested that “if LBJ would happen to mention to Katie [Graham, publisher of the Washington Post] over a cocktail that he certainly misses seeing his good friend Roy Wilkins’ column in Washington, I don’t think it would do any harm.” Letter to Roy Wilkins from Philip G. Reed, March 18, 1966, Roy Wilkins Papers, Box 40, Folder: Speeches and Writings File, R&T Syndicate Newspaper Columns, Business Correspondence, 1965-1970, LOC.

22 Letters to and from Young and Benjamin Spock, May 5 and May 12, 1965, NUL Papers, Part II, Series I, Box 34, Folder: Administration Dept., General Department File, Miscellaneous Organizations, 1965, LOC; Letter from Whitney Young to A. Philip Randolph, July 15, 1966, NUL Papers, Part III, Box 406, Folder: No. 7 Young, Whitney M. Jr. 6-12-1966 (2 of 3), LOC.

23 Carol Anderson’s “A Black Panther in ‘Fat Cat’s’ Clothing: the NAACP and the Battle for the Italian Colonies, 1948-1950,” presented at the 2001 SHAFR conference at American University, indicates that the NAACP leadership, including Wilkins, was still fighting against colonialism in the early 1950s.


25 Weiss, “From Black Separatism,” 82.


28 Haines, “Black Radicalization,” 42.


31 Lawson, "Mixing Moderation," 86.


33 For more on Wilkins’ attempt to oust Walter White in the late 1940s see Nathaniel Patrick Tillman, Jr. “Walter Francis White: A Study in Interest Group Leadership” (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1961), 141-175. For more on the 1960s internal challenge to Wilkins’ leadership see Memo to LBJ from Jack Valenti, November 13, 1964, WHCF, Folder: “IV/1964/ST 32 NYC 6/15/64-11/19-64,” Box 19, LBJL; “Seek to Oust NAACP Board Members,” Jet 1 October 1964, 3-4.; For an account of the unsuccessful internal challenge by the Young Turks see August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, “Organizational Structure and Goal Succession: A Comparative Analysis of the NAACP and CORE.” Social Science Quarterly 51 (June 1970), 18-22. For more on Wilkins reaction to external challenge see Garrow, “FBI Harassment,” 12 and Garrow, “Commentary to ‘Creative Tensions’” 61.

34 Goodwin, Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream, 191. Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach said “Johnson 'bent over backwards' to wipe out the Southern part of his background.” Wolk, The Presidency, 232; Schlesinger, Robert F. Kennedy, 657; Also see Williams, “Huey, Lyndon, and Southern Radicalism,” 287.


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