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[Dis]Assembling Race: The FEPC in Oklahoma, 1941-1946

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“[Dis]Assembling Race: The FEPC in Oklahoma, 1941-1946”

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in History

by

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ABSTRACT

On the World War II home front in Oklahoma the Fair Employment Practice Committee (FEPC) succeeded in securing defense jobs for African Americans. The efforts of the committee, *The Oklahoma Eagle*, the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, and the State Conference of Branches of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) advanced civil rights in Oklahoma throughout World War II and beyond. The efforts of the FEPC in Oklahoma connect civil rights efforts in the 1940s directly to *Brown v Board of Education*, (1954) and the classic civil rights movement.

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DEDICATION

Kelley, Shane, Ray, and Nieta, thanks for always believing.

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Introduction

On January 21, 1942, Amos T. Hall, an African American attorney, and leader of the NAACP in Tulsa, wrote to Walter White, Executive Secretary of the NAACP. Hall provided an update about efforts in Tulsa to utilize the FEPC to secure defense jobs for black Tulsans. Since late 1940, the Tulsa NAACP had pressured DuPont Ordnance Works and Douglas Aircraft to employ African Americans during construction of their facilities, and after they opened. Hall was proud of black Tulsans. "Without any attempt at boasting, I must say that we are very proud of our accomplishments." Local blacks were now employed as skilled carpenters at Douglas and in skilled and unskilled positions at DuPont. Additionally, Douglas Aircraft offered paid training courses for black men and women and promised skilled production positions upon their completion. The Tulsa NAACP had secured "a very great contribution to the economic status of [Hall's] people." Accomplishments such as those described by Hall were made possible by successful cooperation between black activists in Tulsa and the Fair Employment Practice Committee. Together the committee and black leaders were securing economic opportunity for African Americans across the state of Oklahoma and would continue to do so for the duration of the war."¹

The Fair Employment Practice Committee worked in Oklahoma. In World War II-era Oklahoma alone, thousands of African Americans took paid training courses and worked in defense industries. Among the thousands of war workers were hundreds in skilled positions, men and women alike. In the Tulsa area both Douglas Aircraft and DuPont Ordnance Works

¹ "Hats off to the Negroes at Tulsa!," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, January 31, 1942 and John H. Bracey, Jr. and August Meier, eds., *Papers of the NAACP: Part 13: NAACP and Labor*, Amos T. Hall to Walter White, January 21, 1942, Reel 13, Slide 127.

employed over 1,000 African Americans in skilled production positions. DuPont had an entire production line in which all positions, from janitorial to managerial were held by African Americans.² Oklahoma City hosted a Douglas Aircraft production facility and the Oklahoma City Air Depot (OCAD), and both facilities employed blacks in skilled positions and integrated production areas. At OCAD, black workers made up 9.2% of the entire workforce, a figure that was roughly equal to the 9.5% of the city's population that was African American. During construction of the Oklahoma City Douglas facility black workers were widely used in skilled and unskilled positions; the practice continued after the facility opened.³ In McAlester, at the Naval

² Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX; "War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports," October 24, 1942; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; Records of the War Manpower Commission, Record Group 211; National Archives and Record Administration, Kansas City, MO. [hereafter RG 211.]; Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, "War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports," February 25, 1943; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211; G. R. Cantwell, Manager, Oklahoma Ordnance Works and G. W. Crockett, Service Superintendent to Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX; February 22, 1944; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211; Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, "War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports," July 24, 1943; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211 and U.S. Census Bureau, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940*, "Composition of the Population, by Counties: 1940," 826. <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-volume-2/33972538v2p5ch8.pdf> (accessed July 28, 2021).

³ Truman K. Gibson, Acting Civilian Aid to the Secretary of War, to George M. Johnson, Assistant to the FEPC Chairman, September 16, 1943; Cases Closed W: Freddie Williams, Box 11 of 15, Cases Closed 1943-1946; RG 228; "Labor Market Developments Report, for the Oklahoma City, Oklahoma Area," June 29, 1943; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211; Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, "War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports," July 24, 1943; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211, "Field Operations Report, Oklahoma City, Labor Area," December 1945; Folder 533.052, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; Records of the War Manpower Commission, RG 211; "Labor Market Developments Report, for the Oklahoma City, Oklahoma Area," December 1945; Folder 533.052, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; Records of the War Manpower Commission, RG 211 and Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, *Historical Census Statistics On Population Tables by Race, 1790 to 1990, and By Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For Large Cities And Other Urban Places in The United States* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, 2005). <https://web.archive.org/web/20120812191959/http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0076/twps0076.html>, (accessed July 31, 2021).

Munitions Depot, blacks held 19% of all positions, a stunning number considering only 10% of the population in the city was black.⁴

The FEPC, of course, did have limits. There were a few plants – including the J. Paul Getty-owned Spartan Aircraft facility in Tulsa and the National Zinc Company smelter in Bartlesville, that defied the federal government, refused to hire black job seekers, and reserved jobs for white workers. From the start of the committee, it dealt with several operational challenges. The committee never had a budget or staff large enough to pursue the monumental task of stopping discriminatory hiring practices in defense industries in the United States. Most challenging, the agency could not monitor defense facilities for FEPC compliance or look for wrongdoing. Instead, the committee's design required it wait until receiving a complaint before acting. Should the FEPC find a facility did not comply with non-discriminatory hiring policies, the agency had no authority to force companies into compliance. Technically, the committee could recommend government contracts be pulled from offending companies, but due to wartime needs, the FEPC never took that action, nor did defense contractors think they would. As a result, if discriminatory defense contractors could ignore FEPC requests for compliance and withstand negative publicity brought by local black activists, companies could refuse to hire African Americans with no penalties.

The FEPC, however, still accomplished the fundamental goals A. Philip Randolph envisioned for it. Foremost, Randolph feared that the coming world war would be a repeat of

⁴ Ormbsee, R., FEPC Investigator, Region IX, to File. "Amendment to Final Disposition Report, Region IX, Naval Ammunition Depot, McAlester, Oklahoma," December 11, 1944; Cases Closed 1943-1946, Cases Closed: Naval Muniton Depot, Box 10 of 15; RG 228.

the Black experiences during the Great War, when most African Americans adopted the “close ranks” philosophy of W. E. B. DuBois and put aside special grievances during the conflict in hopes that black patriotism would purchase equality of citizenship for blacks after the war. Closing ranks failed and the end of the war ushered in a period of racial oppression and violence – race riots across the nation in 1919 – culminated in Tulsa massacre. For Randolph, the fight for Black rights at home had to continue even as the nation was fighting the forces of fascism in Europe and Asia.

Randolph also realized that the nation’s Blacks would be excluded from high-paying defense employment unless federal action was taken. Defense contractors openly discriminated against black applicants. By 1940, mobilization had already created about 250,000 defense jobs – skilled and unskilled – that were closed to blacks. For Example, in St. Louis 56 defense contractors had hired on average only three black employees, and these were usually relegated to janitorial workers. Additionally, the United States Employment Service (USES) reported that 50% of what would come to be known as essential industries did not hire African Americans and did not plan to do so, regardless of potential wartime needs. Confronted with this reality, Randolph resolved to make sure African Americans benefited from wartime opportunities during World War II.⁵

As World War II loomed, Randolph worked to ensure African Americans would avoid a repeat of the World War I home front, benefit from defense jobs, and lay the foundation for

⁵ Paula F. Pfeffer. *A. Philip Randolph, Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University: 1990), Kindle Edition, 563-567, 1064-1072 and Zieger, Robert H. and Gilbert J. Gall, et al, *American Workers, American Unions: The Twentieth and Early Twenty-First Centuries* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2014), 124.

future civil rights victories. Randolph asserted in January 1941 that his World War II aims were quite simple, “we loyal-Negro American Citizens demand the right to work and fight for our country.”⁶ Randolph’s fight for Executive Order 8802 and the FEPC provide insight into the race leader’s wartime goals and his expectations of what those goals could achieve. At base, Randolph was a pragmatic leader and negotiator. He knew he could never get everything he proposed, but he also knew concrete gains advancing employment opportunities for blacks could be won. Initially, Randolph’s two big goals were the integration of the armed forces and defense industries. When first presented with these requests in September of 1940, President Roosevelt refused and offered no concessions whatsoever. Randolph knew, if his aims were to be achieved the requests had to be turned into demands. Thus, was born the March on Washington Movement. Randolph called for a March on Washington to happen in June of 1941 unless President Roosevelt agreed to the immediate integration of the armed forces and defense industries. The event promised to bring 100,000 black Americans to Washington, D.C. After much back and forth, Randolph and other black leaders agreed to cancel the proposed march in exchange for Roosevelt issuing Executive Order 8802 and creating the Fair Employment Practices Committee to enforce it on June 25, 1941. The order promised “the full and equitable participation of all workers in defense agencies without discrimination because of race, creed, color, or national origin.”⁷

⁶ A. Philip Randolph, “Defense Rotten,” *PC*, January 24, 1941, 13, in Glenda Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York W.W. Norton, 2009), 358.

⁷ Andrew E. Kersten and Clarence Lang, eds., *Reframing Randolph: Labor, Black Freedom, and the Legacies of A. Philip Randolph* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), Kindle Edition, 18-20; Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008), 320-321; Paula F. Pfeffer. A. *Philip Randolph, Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement*, 563-580 (quote), 597-606, 1064-1072 and Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions: The Twentieth and Early Twenty-First Centuries*, 124.

Randolph did not achieve everything he initially proposed, nor had he expected to do so. He had, however, gained a tool that would allow African American to avoid a replay of the World War I home front experience, fight employment discrimination, and gain access to well-paying jobs. Perhaps just importantly, it aligned the fight for black jobs with the nation's war effort, a factor that would allow Black wartime activism to be seen as patriotic and necessary. Randolph knew there would be limits and failures associated with the agency. The success of the FEPC, therefore, must be judged in terms of these limited goals rather than by its success in ending all workplace discrimination.

There were three incarnations of the FEPC established through Executive Order 8802 June 25, 1941, Executive Order 9040 January 24, 1942, and Executive Order 9346 May 27, 1943. Therefore, the original mandates and structure of the agency changed over time. The first FEPC, created by Executive order 8802, declared there should be no discrimination in defense facilities that held federal contracts, established federal job training programs for all, and created the Fair Employment Practices Committee –an ostensible enforcement agency designed to investigate the problem of employment discrimination – to ensure the successful implementation of the Executive Order and resolve complaints of discrimination.⁸

The FEPC was housed in the Office of Production Management, headed by Sidney Hillman, a long-time advocate of the CIO and black workers, took the FEPC's mission seriously, scheduling hearings to investigate discrimination in the railroad industry. With the United States officially at war, Roosevelt created the War Production Board in January of 1942 to replace the Office of Production Management. In August 1942, Roosevelt

⁸ Ibid.

signed Executive Order 9040 moving the FEPC into the War Production Board (WPB). The WPB immediately cut the FEPC's budget and canceled hearings. In response, Randolph threatened another March on Washington and again forced Roosevelt's hand. On May 27, 1943, Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9346, reestablishing his commitment to the agency by placing it within the Executive Branch and strengthening it. The FEPC now included twelve regional offices and a mandate that government contracts with defense companies include non-discrimination language. Furthermore, it benefited from being directly associated with the popular President.⁹

Regardless of the bureaucratic home of the agency, the FEPC could not go looking for discrimination to root out. It could only act upon receiving a complain and the complaint process remained sluggish and difficult to navigation. This meant the success of the committee relied heavily on black community organizations and the black press to educate workers about their rights, help them file complainants, and navigate the bureaucratic processes. Complaints had to be filed on an official form, signed, list the party charged, and provide an example of discrimination related to employment. Details such as dates, names of all parties involved and their position within the discriminating organization had to be included as well. When the FEPC received a complaints either in an official form or a general letter of complaint – a committee representative would review it. If there was not enough information, the FEPC would contact the complainant to seek additional information or assist them in filing the appropriate paperwork. If complaints were not fully completed when first submitted, complainants usually

⁹ Andrew Kersten, *Race, Jobs, and the War: The FEPC in the Midwest, 1941-1946* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 45; Merl E. Reed, *Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement: The President's Committee on Fair Employment Practice 1941-1946*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 206 and Paula F. Pfeffer. *A. Philip Randolph, 1072-1089*.

did not respond to agency requests for additional information, another reason local education and activism was important to the successful resolution of complaints. If complaints contained the proper information, the complaint would be placed on a docket and an investigator would contact and meet with the company charged. Cases could be dismissed for insufficient information, on their merits after an investigation, or “satisfactorily” closed when the facility charged agreed to do what the FEPC asked and promised to avoid the same issue in the future.¹⁰

The bureaucratic structure of the FEPC meant that its only records documented discrimination and injustice, The largest source of documents are complaints of wrongdoing. These evidentiary challenges are reflected in the historiography of the FEPC. Many have judged the committee to be failure because the agency did not produce reports devoted to FEPC successes. That type of reporting was not in its mandate. The agency existed to deal with individual complaints and monitor defense facilities for compliance with FEPC rules. When things were going well, the agency did not always report that. It only reported in detail when investigating and closing complaints.

Overall historiographic assessments of the effectiveness of the FEPC can be placed into one of three broad categories. Historians who argue the FEPC failed, claim the agency had very limited success and then only due to severe wartime labor shortages. In the second wave of scholarship, histories focusing on the broader civil rights movement also contend the FEPC made little headway in ending employment discrimination. More recently, scholars focused on

¹⁰ Andrew Kersten, *Race, Jobs, and the War*, 45 and Merl E. Reed, *Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement*, 215.

local areas have demonstrated substantial FEPC success when local black organizations mobilized activists and partnered with the FEPC.

The earliest monographs about the FEPC, written in the 1940s and 1950s, argued the committee had very limited success and made no real difference for African Americans. Historians, including William H. Chafe, Richard Polenbug, and Barton J. Bernstein, argue any wartime employment gains were due to severe labor shortages on the World War II home front and not the activities of the FEPC. In this argument, African Americans would have achieved all their wartime employment gains whether the FEPC ever existed, or not.¹¹ Louis Ruchames' *Race, Jobs, and Politics: The Story of the FEPC* (1953), Louis Kesselman's *Social Politics of the FEPC: A Study in Reform Pressure Movements* (1948), and Herbert Garfinkle's *When Negroes March: The March on Washington* (1959), all agree the committee did not make a difference during World War II. Rather, they attest any benefits provided by the FEPC were through its legacy of establishing strong community organizations and working with the federal government.¹²

Historians who judge the FEPC to be a failure base their arguments on what they believe the FEPC *should* have done and what it *should* have accomplished, rather than the pragmatic lens of A. Philip Randolph and his primary goals for the committee. Randolph never believed

¹¹ William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II* (London: Oxford University Press, 2014), 15-19, Richard Polenbug, *War and Society: The United States, 1914-1945* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1980), 99-106, Barton J. Bernstein, "America in War and Peace: The Test of Liberalism," in Bernstein, ed., *Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969), 297-298.

¹² Louis Ruchames, *Race, Jobs, and Politics: The Story of the FEPC* (New York: Columbia University, Press, 1953); 17-23, 156-158 and Louis Coleridge Kesselman, *The Social Politics of the FEPC: A Study in Reform Pressure Movements* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1948), 87-98 and Herbert Garfinkle, *When Negroes March: The March on Washington Movement in the Organizational Politics for the FEPC* (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1959), 1-7.

the FEPC would end Jim Crow in employment and usher in a racially utopian United States. The real aims Randolph worked for were practical and achievable. Avoid a repeat of the World War I home front, secure job opportunities and economic gains for African Americans, and lay the foundation for future integration efforts in the future. These goals were achieved. The FEPC was a tool for wartime gains and a crucial stepping-stone toward ending Jim Crow segregation. Historians like Harvard Sitkoff, who judge the FEPC a failure, often cite Randolph's initial hailing of the FEPC as a "new Emancipation Proclamation." Clearly, Sitkoff argues, the FEPC was not that important. The argument is faulty but instructive. It conflates the Emancipation Proclamation with all the later success – Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments – that contributed to the end of slavery. The Emancipation was thus the beginning of a process; it laid the foundation for further action. The FEPC is treated the same. When created, the FEPC had limitation and varying levels of success, but long-term, the agency became the rock upon which all future victories against Jim Crow would be built. Within the historiography of the FEPC those finding the most fault are the ones who expected immediate and total success. They seek to judge the FEPC as a panacea rather than a new tool in the ongoing civil rights struggle in the workplace, as black leaders saw it at the time.¹³

Prompted by the first wave of FEPC arguments, historians of the broader civil rights movement also dismiss the FEPC's wartime importance. Harvard Sitkoff in *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue* (1978), is adamant the FEPC was intended to fail and did so. Sitkoff proclaimed the FEPC had been created as a clever ruse to

¹³ Cornelius L. Bynum, *A. Philip Randolph and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 178-179; Kersten and Lang, *Reframing Randolph*, 19; Paula F. Pfeffer, *A. Philip Randolph, Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement*, 606-608 and Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality*, 322-323.

give the appearance that progress had been made in employment sectors. He goes so far as to label it a “wailing wall” for blacks seeding employment. They now had an agency to which they could complain about unfair treatment but calls for integration rarely produced work.¹⁴

Similarly, in *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (2009), Glenda Gilmore argued the FEPC failed, and never had a chance to succeed. Gilmore stated committee had no support in Washington, D.C. as Roosevelt had “issued an executive order, but he lacked the will to enforce it.” As a result, defense companies just ignored the committee altogether.¹⁵ Ira Katznelson in *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (2013), maintained the “southern cage” and power of segregationist legislatures prevented any substantial gains being made with the FEPC, especially in the South. He claims any “significant” progress happened in the North alone.¹⁶

The most recent wave of FEPC scholarship argues that the FEPC succeeded in several locations. Importantly, local black activists were the keys to wartime FEPC success. Where strong black activist networks existed, and black leaders partnered with the FEPC, black workers got skilled wartime jobs. Merle Reed first wrote about the FEPC in in two articles, “The FEPC, Black Workers, and Southern Shipyards,” (1973) and “The FEPC and Pennsylvania’s Black Workers, the Defense Industries, and the Federal Agencies, 1941-1945” (1986). He noted that success for the FEPC could vary widely depending upon location and the willingness of local African Americans to compromise. In the former article, Reed presented evidence that the FEPC

¹⁴ Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 3.

¹⁵ Glenda Gilmore’s *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950*, New York W.W. Norton, 2009), 362.

¹⁶ Ira Katznelson in *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2013), 287.

had been successful in “forcing an Alabama shipyard to hire skilled black workers” on the condition that they enter the ship via segregated paths. When examining shipyards further north, agency success rates were much higher. He noted similar findings in areas with high percentages of black population. In his monograph, *Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement: The President’s Committee on Fair Employment Practice, 1941-1946*, (1991), Reed expanded his scope to include all twelve regional offices of the FEPC. In each region he found FEPC success in areas with high levels of black activism.¹⁷

Andrew Kersten, *In Race, Jobs, and the War* (2000), also wrote about local successes of the FEPC. Kersten deems the FEPC an unequivocal success as it succeeded in its two primary goals: to help black and other minorities gain wartime employment, and to help win the war. The author focuses on a discrete geographic area – “the Great Lakes Industrial Region” – through which he charts the successes of the FEPC from north to south. Like Reed, he highlights the importance of local black organizations to successful FEPC efforts in cities like Detroit and Chicago with large activist communities.¹⁸ Recent works by Joseph Able, “African Americans, Labor Unions, and the Struggle for Fair Employment in the Aircraft Manufacturing Industry of Texas” (2011), and Tabitha Orr, “Clifford Minton’s War: The Struggle for Black Jobs in Wartime Little Rock, 1940-1946” (2017), have also found evidence of local FEPC success when paired black activism.¹⁹

¹⁷ Merl E. Reed, “The FEPC, the Black Worker, and the Southern Shipyards,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 74 (Autumn 1975), 446-467; Merl E. Reed, “The FEPC and Pennsylvania’s Black Workers, the Defense Industries, and the Federal Agencies, 1941-1945,” *Labor History*, XXVII, (1986) 365-384 and Reed, *Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement*, 4-8.

¹⁸ Kersten, *Race, Jobs, and the War*, 1-7.

¹⁹ Orr, Tabitha, “Clifford Minton’s War: The Struggle for Black Jobs in Wartime Little Rock, 1940-1946,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* (Spring 2017): 23-48 and Abel, Joseph. “African Americans, Labor Unions, and the

“[Dis]Assembling Race: The FEPC in Oklahoma” challenges and contributes to the historiography of the FEPC in several ways. It contributes to existing arguments about the importance of local conditions to FEPC success and the committee’s long-term legacy. When examining complaints, the most important variables in pursuit of FEPC success were local conditions. The easiest path to employment opportunity was cooperation between the FEPC, a local black newspaper and an engaged and militant black community. The most crucial ingredient being the local community. If black community organization and activism existed in sufficient quantities, the absence of a black newspaper could be overcome. Oklahoma is also an important local variable when compared to other states. After statehood, black Oklahomans developed a culture of resistance based on federal intervention and statist solutions to Jim Crow problems. The long-term statist orientation of black activism in Oklahoma challenges arguments by scholars like Andrew Kersten and Paula Pfeffer who claim the FEPC taught blacks the importance of federal intervention. The argument assumes African Americans did not discover statist solutions to problems until the creation of the FEPC. Since statehood in Oklahoma, black community leaders had geared all civil rights efforts toward prompting federal intervention.²⁰

“[Dis]Assembling Race,” also argues that the long-term legacy of the FEPC is more important than previously argued by scholars like Merle Reed have allowed. The FEPC provided stability for civil rights efforts during World War II and after. Before World War I, African

Struggle for Fair Employment in the Aircraft Manufacturing Industry of Texas, 1941-1945,” *The Journal of Southern History*, 77 (August 2011), 595-638.

²⁰ Kersten, *Race, Jobs, and the War*, 4 and Paula F. Pfeffer. *A. Philip Randolph*, 1059-1064.

Americans in Oklahoma were very organized and adept at prompting federal intervention. World War I home front failures to secure opportunity for African Americans devastated existing organizational efforts. It took until World War II to regain the momentum African Americans had built before the conflict. The FEPC, however, by providing jobs and economic security, meant civil rights activism strengthened and accelerated on the World War II home front. At the end of the World War II, the NAACP and community organizations were in their best ever positions to steam into the classic civil rights era. A fact supported by post-war Supreme Court victories in *Sipuel* (1948) and *McLaurin* (1950). In this way, the FEPC provided a bridge from World War II activism to *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954).²¹

This dissertation further challenges works that maintain any FEPC successes were a result of wartime labor shortages. Oklahoma, like the rest of the United States, dealt with severe labor shortages on the World War II home front. Contrary to labor shortage arguments, however, in Oklahoma defense contractors were quite willing to suffer production delays if it meant not hiring blacks and avoiding trouble with white employees, production goals be damned.

“[Dis]Assembling Race” uniquely contributes to the existing historiography of African Americans in Oklahoma and the FEPC as it examines how African Americans and their community organizations operated on the World War II home front in Oklahoma and utilized the FEPC to create economic opportunity. The work fills several gaps in the historical record. In addition to being the first to look at black employment on the World War II home front and the

²¹ Charles B. Chamberlain, *Victory at Home: Manpower and Race in the American South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 5 and Reed, *Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement*, 17. [quote, italics added].

operations of the FEPC in Oklahoma, “[Dis]Assembling Race” also examines the importance of local civil rights organizations to the success of the FEPC and its long-term legacies. Beginning with Indian Removal in the 1830s, this dissertation traces the development of African American militancy from the establishment of all-black towns to the building of the Oklahoma State Conference of NAACP Branches from 1931-1950.

Chapter one contends that the origins of African American militancy in Oklahoma and how pre-statehood experiences, the failure of “closing ranks” in World War I, and the horrors of the 1921 Massacre failed to break the drive of black Oklahomans. In fact, the Massacre forged them into the most militant activists on the World War II home front. That activist bent made community leaders in Oklahoma prepared to wrench the most benefits possible from the FEPC.

Chapters two through four examine the operations of the FEPC with a focus on cooperation with community activists and black newspapers, and FEPC interactions with complaints and complainants. The chapter devoted to Tulsa demonstrates the importance of a militant black press to successfully pressuring defense industries to comply with FEPC mandates. In Tulsa, without *The Oklahoma Eagle*, the FEPC would have been much less successful. Chapter three argues, the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch* and the local branch of the NAACP played major roles in FEPC success in Oklahoma City. The most important aspect of Oklahoma City FEPC cases, however, is the work of Roscoe Dunjee, president of the Oklahoma State Conference of NAACP Branches and publisher of the *Black Dispatch*. Dunjee’s organizational strength and influence forced the state to allow blacks to train for defense jobs. Additionally, Dunjee worked tirelessly to find FEPC complainants and help them navigate the agency in pursuit of successful resolutions like skilled employment or reinstatement when

improperly fired. Chapter Four contends the efforts of the FEPC in cities outside the urban centers of Tulsa and Oklahoma City. In McAlester, Muskogee, and Bartlesville, local black leaders utilizing the FEPC without the support of a local black newspaper adjusted their FEPC strategies to use the agency as leverage against discriminatory hiring policies. Sometimes these different approaches worked, and sometimes the absence of a local black newspaper, and the pressure it provided, could not be overcome even with the help of the FEPC. The final chapter, "Forward to Brown," maintains that the FEPC and the fight for black jobs provided the foundation for postwar attacks on the larger Jim Crow order, especially in education. The state NAACP led the charge following World War II, providing the plaintiffs and funding for the landmark *Sipuel v. Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma* (1948) and *McLaurin v Oklahoma State Regents* (1950) cases.

The FEPC helped provide access to wartime employment. Paid training became available for black workers as did promotions and salary increases. These dividends were the result of determination and cooperation between FEPC representatives and local black leaders. All parties were committed to the work. Some complaints took years to resolve, but they did get resolved. The FEPC also helped more black workers than ever to join unions. Finally, the FEPC allowed African Americans in Oklahoma to continue their legacy of militant civil rights successes through the war and into the classic civil rights era.

"[Dis]Assembling Race: the FEPC and Oklahoma," reveals an imperfect FEPC that labored through structural and enforcement challenges, and still succeeded in its ultimate goals. As Andrew Kersten noted, more African Americans got work, and we won the war.²²In Oklahoma

²² Kersten, *Race Jobs and the War*, 14.

FEPC cases reveal dedicated representatives of the agency working hand and hand black leaders. Together they created unique and adaptable solutions that yielded results for as many black citizens as possible. Efforts on the World War II home front birthed the classic civil rights movement from the plains of Oklahoma.

Historians working to interpret the FEPC's record and its importance to African Americans have pondered why did black citizens fight so hard to keep the FEPC after the war, especially if it was, as most historians insist, an ineffective organization? In addition to the fact that the committee represented a federal government expending effort to address concerns specific to African Americans, quite simply, the FEPC worked. It fulfilled the expectations of those who demanded its creation. The committee prevented a repeat of the World War I home front, secured skilled employment for black workers, and provided a path toward full employment integration in the future. The FEPC also ensured civil rights momentum continued after the war without interruption. No rebuilding of organizations or efforts had to happen like they did after World War I. Based on this answer, "[Dis]Assembling Race: the FEPC in Oklahoma," offers a different question. If the FEPC failed in its efforts during World War II and did not inspire, and make possible, other civil rights battles, why did conservatives and white supremacist fight so hard to destroy it? Again, the answer is simple, it worked and advanced the ongoing battle for civil rights in the United States.

Oklahoma Before the FEPC

Beginning in 1931 Oklahoma emerged as the most important state for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and its ongoing quest to improve the lives of African Americans. This importance began with a revolutionary idea from Roscoe Dunjee, the publisher of the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*. He led the creation of the State Conference of Branches of the NAACP in Oklahoma in 1931 – the first in the country. The State Conference of NAACP Branches served as an umbrella organization with which to coordinate activism among local branches, increase membership and total branches, decide which legal cases state NAACP would support, facilitate fundraising, and most importantly, direct where those funds went rather than letting the national office determine priorities for Black Oklahomans.

As Dunjee described, Oklahoma's black activists needed "a real directing agency that could speak with authority, and which could reach out into every section Oklahoma and actually command respect and get results." The Conference of Branches proved wildly successful, and consequently, the organization went from five founding branches – Guthrie, Tulsa, Chickasha, Muskogee, and Oklahoma City – in 1931 to an astounding eighty-three branches by 1945. All the years of hard work meant that when President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802 and created the Fair Employment Practice Committee on the eve of World War II, black Oklahomans had developed an organization that would allow them to demand, and achieve, employment opportunities.²³

²³ "A State Organization for Defense," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, May 14, 1931; "State Conference of Branches, NAACP, Holds Memorable Session in Oklahoma City," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, June 6, 1935 and

Shaped by a unique history, Black Oklahomans developed a culture of resistance based on militancy and appeals to the federal government for statist solutions to civil rights challenges. After the Civil War, in the federally administered Twin Territories – Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory – Reconstruction did not end in the 1870s as it did in other parts of the South but continued until statehood in 1907. Redemption, marked by an end of federal protections and state efforts to enact disfranchisement and Jim Crow segregation, happened thirty years later in the territories than it did throughout the remainder of the former Confederate States of America. Until statehood, the Twin Territories remained a space in which African Americans could vote and accumulate wealth without the fear of state instituted Jim Crow policies. Realizing this, blacks throughout the South made their way to the territories to stake claims to prosperity without fear of racially motivated violence. Although they certainly encountered racism and white supremacy, the new migrants, alongside tribal Freedmen, prospered, some fabulously so. The Tulsa Race Massacre in 1921, fourteen years after statehood, occurred as reaction to widespread African American affluence.²⁴

African Americans maintained a continuity of activism stretching from statehood, through the 1921 Massacre and into the World War II era. The history of African Americans in Oklahoma before World War II is best understood as two periods, pre-1921 Massacre and post-1921 Massacre. Before the Massacre in 1921, race workers focused on appeals to the federal courts to reverse Oklahoma's efforts to usher in Redemption after statehood by disfranchising

John Henry Lee Thompson, "The Little Caesar of civil rights: Roscoe Dunjee in Oklahoma City, 1915 to 1955, PhD diss., (Purdue University, 1990), 70-75, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/303860114> (accessed July 26, 2021).

²⁴ Hannibal B. Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration: All Black Towns in Oklahoma* (Fort Worth: Eakin Press, 2002), Kindle, 6-7.

black voters. The first of many Supreme Court victories for black Oklahomans, *Guinn v United States* (1915), reestablished the right of African Americans to vote in the state. Furthermore, the 1921 Massacre in Tulsa, did not break the spirit of African Americans, instead, it galvanized a sense of militant responsibility for blacks throughout the state. Before World War II, black leaders turned to the federal courts to ensure due process, interracial juries, and an end to coerced confessions. Again, black Oklahomans were successful. With the arrival of World War II and the creation of the Fair Employment Practice Committee (FEPC), African Americans in Oklahoma, conditioned through years of activism geared toward prompting federal intervention, were prepared to utilize the FEPC to press for defense industry jobs for black citizens. The years of activism, though, had taught them that federal action was not a magic wand that would instantly remove racial injustice. Therefore, federal action court decisions, legislation, or executive orders – were not ends in themselves but tools to be employed by activists as part of a larger struggle to gain full citizenship for African Americans.

Blacks first arrived in the area that would become Oklahoma in the 1830s as enslaved people, brought by Native American slaveholders. During the Civil War, this slavery came to an end, the product of a combination of self-emancipation and military actions. African Americans left their tribal owners, especially those aligned with the Confederacy, to enlist in union efforts in the Twin Territories. For instance, at the Battle of Honey Springs on July 17, 1863, blacks from the territories joined the First Colored Kansas Infantry in dealing a decisive blow to Confederate efforts in the West.²⁵

²⁵ Marcus Nelson, "The Battle of Honey Springs, Indian Territory (1863)," Black Past, May 3, 2020, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/the-battle-of-honey-springs-indian-territory-1863/> (accessed

Following the Civil War, a triumphant federal government required Native American tribes to incorporate blacks as Freedmen and full citizens. Tribal citizenship allowed Freedmen access to land, wealth, and the ballot, along with protection from the Federal Government. The treaties of 1865 and 1866 ensured Reconstruction until statehood and made the territories an attractive destination for blacks across the United States, especially the deep South, as they headed north and west. With the arrival of statehood in 1907, federal oversight gave way to home rule. Rights and protections immediately began to erode as the state's white leaders sought to disfranchise black voters.²⁶

Black Landowners

Land allotments held by tribal Freedmen, and protected by the federal government, are the foundation of Oklahoma's unique culture of black resistance upon which civil rights struggles were built. Enslaved blacks first arrived in Indian Territory, in what is now eastern Oklahoma, with the Five Civilized Tribes -- Cherokee, Choctaw, Muskogee (Creek), Seminole, and Chickasha – during President Andrew Jackson's policies of Indian Removal in the 1830s. Following the Civil War in which all five tribes supported the Confederacy in whole or part, the United States government required new treaties with each of the tribes. Treaty negotiations happened in two waves. The treaties of 1865 and 1866 required the Five Civilized Tribes to free their enslaved people and make them tribal members. These new Freedmen benefited greatly

July 26, 2021) and Travel Oklahoma, "African American History & Culture in Oklahoma," https://www.travelok.com/article_page/african-american-history-culture-in-oklahoma (accessed July 21, 2021).

²⁶ Arrell M. Gibson, *Oklahoma: A History of Five Centuries*, (Norman: Harlow Publishing Company, 1965), 41; Arthur L. Tolson, *The Black Oklahomans A History, 1541-1972*, (New Orleans: Edwards Printing Company, 1974), 41-45; Jimmy Lewis Franklin, *The Blacks in Oklahoma*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 45; Billy Joan English and Sharon Calhoun, *Oklahoma Heritage*, 3rd. (Oklahoma City: ACP, Inc. 1995), 125 and Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration: All-Black Towns in Oklahoma*, 33, 63-64, 72-73.

from this arrangement. It allowed them to accumulate wealth and, starting in 1887, land. That year, the federal government began breaking up traditional patterns of collective tribal land ownership and requiring allotments be distributed to individual tribal members, including Freedmen. The creation of tribal Freedmen is crucial to the civil rights history of Oklahoma, and the United States, because as tribal members in the Twin Territories enjoyed federal protection of land holdings and the ballot until 1907. African Americans in the rest of the former confederacy, conversely, witnessed land ownership and ballot access decline after the arrival of Redemption in 1877. As a result, African Americans in the territories were landholders, voters, and, therefore, more politically and economically powerful than anywhere else in the United States. With this economic power and federal protection, they developed all-black towns, another source of organization in Oklahoma.²⁷

The relatively secure lives of the Freedmen in Indian Territory created an environment in which African American activism and statewide organization started exceedingly early. As landholders with federal protections, early Freedmen often felt a stronger affinity toward Native Americans than they did black migrants making their way into the territory from the deep South. Freedmen called black migrants “State Negroes” and viewed them as a separate group based on their “slave mentality” and their submissive and deferential behavior. As one Creek Freedman put it: “I was eating out of the same pot with the Indians while they were still licking their master’s boots in Texas.” New migrants, however, quickly proved there were just

²⁷ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 24-25; David R. Morgan, Robert E. England and George G. Humphrey, *Oklahoma Politics and Policies: Governing the Sooner State* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991) 41 and Claudio Saunt, *Black, White, and Indian: Race and the Unmaking of an American Family* (London: Oxford University Press, 2005) Kindle, 1593-1647.

as committed to civil rights progress as Oklahoma's Freedmen. After all, braving the dangers of migration for the hope of a better future was the most militant act blacks could take. Migrants to Oklahoma were pushed by Jim Crow conditions and violence in the South and pulled by a chance at economic opportunity and the security in the all-black towns of Oklahoma.²⁸

The same land allotments that created early opportunities for Freedmen gave birth to all-black towns. Even before tribal lands were divided in accordance with the Dawes Commission, Freedmen often lived near one another, or in small communities. When tribal lands began to be divided in the late 1880s, again Freedmen opted to stay together. They chose allotments that bordered one another. As a result, existing black communities were strengthened by legally enforceable black ownership of land and opportunities for new all-black towns were created as well. As the towns grew and word of their residents' successes spread, Oklahoma's all-black towns functioned as lighthouses showing the way to black excellence and opportunity for African Americans in the deep South.

There were several reasons migration to black towns appealed to so many. As Hannibal Johnson noted, "black towns arose as a solution" to the hardships and racism African Americans faced living in the South in the late late-1800s. Business opportunities abounded in these towns as their segregated nature guaranteed a need for black businesses and a steady flow of customers. The towns served as monuments to black accomplishment. They were visible, physical manifestations of black ability and knowledge. Physical and psychological well-being improved, as well. "They enhanced a fragile collective black psyche damaged

²⁸ Norman L. Crockett, *The Black Towns* (Lawrence, Kansas: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1979) 28; Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 8, 24 and Sigmund Sameth, "Creek Negroes: A Study of Race Relations," 56 in Crockett, Norman L, *The Black Towns*, 28. [quote].

immeasurably [by] years of bondage, peonage, and bad treatment.” These “inward facing” aspects of black towns, as Hannibal Johnson called them, were just as important as outward facing ones. Along with business owners, the environment created by Oklahoma’s all-black towns produced race pioneers, militant activists, and nationally recognized leaders.²⁹ Between 1865-1920, Oklahoma had more than fifty all-black towns, more than any other state in the country, each with its own race leaders and activists.³⁰

Boley, exemplifies the type of leadership development that happened in all-black towns in Oklahoma. During a visit in 1904, Booker T. Washington proclaimed Boley to be a town like no other. The all-black town was the ideal of Washington’s Atlanta Compromise speech realized. African Americans had cast down their buckets in Boley and were thriving. In 1911, the population of Boley reached 7000, officially making it the largest all-black town in America at the time and arguably the most progressive. Boley built the first Prince Hall Masonic Temple in Oklahoma, an organization that would later play a crucial role in the modern civil rights movement. Nationally, Boley boasted the first Black Farmers and Merchants Bank, the first black-owned electric company, the first black-owned telephone company, and the First Bank of Boley which was the first black-owned bank to receive a national charter. Citizens of Boley blazed trails other black towns dreamed of someday walking.³¹

In Oklahoma Territory, the western counterpart to Indian Territory, black towns and population increased following the Oklahoma Land Run in 1889. Edward P. McCabe was the most prominent of the all-black town boosters in Oklahoma Territory. McCabe founded the all-

²⁹ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 6-8.

³⁰ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 9-10, 78.

³¹ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 82-84.

black town of Langston, in 1890, as part of his first venture into land speculation. The newspaper he founded, the *City Herald*, promoted migration into the town. He sent agents throughout the South with copies of the paper. “What will you be if you stay in the South? Slaves liable to be killed at anytime and never treated right, but if you come to Oklahoma you have equal chances with the white man, free and independent,” the paper proclaimed. McCabe was so committed to the all-black town concept that he included racial covenants in the deeds to the land he sold to prevent to prevent future white incursion. In 1897, Langston University opened its doors to African Americans. Roscoe Dunjee, the founder of the State Conference of Branches in 1931, joined its inaugural class as did other Oklahoma race leaders.³²

With active recruitment efforts and stories about individual success spreading, the population of African Americans in Indian Territory and Oklahoma Territory grew rapidly after the Land Run. In 1870 there were 6000 blacks in Indian Territory. In 1890, 3000 African Americans lived in Oklahoma Territory while the population in Indian Territory exceeded 18,000. The 1900 census, the last before statehood, counted 19,000 people of color in Oklahoma Territory and an impressive 38,000 in Indian Territory. In 1940, African Americans in Oklahoma numbered 168,849 (7.2%) of a total population of 2,336,434.³³

A drastic uptick in discrimination, segregation, and racial violence accompanied the withdrawal of federal supervision when Oklahoma became a state in 1907. Left to their own devices, white state leaders rushed to create a government modeled on the worst instincts of

³² Jimmy Lewis Franklin, *The Blacks in Oklahoma*, 15-16; Crockett, *The Black Towns*, 20-33 and Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 30-31, 36-38, 40, 42, 61-62.

³³ U.S. Census Bureau, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940*, “Age, by race and sex, for the state, urban and rural: 1940 and 1930,” 797, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-volume-2/33973538v2p5ch8.pdf>, (accessed July 28, 2021).

Redeemers. Lynching statistics illustrate the post-statehood changes. From 1885 to statehood in 1907, there were 106 lynchings. Those lynched included 71 whites, 17 African Americans, 14 Native Americans, 1 Chinese, and three whose race was unknown. After statehood, from 1907 to 1930, lynchings declined, but became racialized and the victims were almost exclusively black. From 1907 to 1930 there were 42 African Americans lynched, with the biggest burst (fifteen) occurring in the eight years following statehood.³⁴

As soon as the constitution was ratified, Oklahoma passed state Law #1 which codified Jim Crow segregation in transportation, public accommodations, education, and outlawed miscegenation. In fact, the only reason Oklahoma waited to enshrine Jim Crow until after statehood is because political leaders – largely Democrats – were afraid that President Theodore Roosevelt would veto the constitution if it included Jim Crow provisions.³⁵ After statehood, with federal oversight and protections gone, black Oklahoma's dealt with an empowered and racially recalcitrant state government. They now focused their civil rights efforts on the federal court system, the only remaining avenue leading to federal intervention.

Guinn v. United States, (1915)

Black Oklahomans proved the efficacy of going to the federal court system in 1915, when black activists convinced the U.S. Supreme Court that Oklahoma's efforts to disfranchise black voters violated the Fifteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The *Guinn* victory at the Supreme Court began a strategic pattern dedicated to securing federal intervention on

³⁴ Johnson, *Black Wall Street 100: An American City Grapples With Its Historical Racial Trauma* (Fort Worth: Eakin Press, 2020), 37-40 and Johnson, 61-62.

³⁵ Franklin, *The Blacks in Oklahoma*, 45 and Johnson, *Black Wall Street 100*, 37-40 and Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 31-33, 63-65, 72.

behalf of black Oklahomans in their fight against white state leaders determined to strip them of their rights as citizens.

The road to *Guinn* began in 1908, when A. C Hamlin, a black man from Tulsa, won election to a seat in the Oklahoma House of Representatives. The event so threatened white leadership that it decided to pass their first constitutional amendment, one year after statehood. White politicians had long been wary of black voters. The voters could generally be ignored because of African American population dispersal throughout the state. In Tulsa and Oklahoma City, however, the population concentration of African Americans could sway local elections. This had long forced politicians from all parties in population centers to attract black voters. Democrats, especially, advertised heavily in local black newspapers. The state constitutional amendment designed to prevent future A. C. Hamlins came to be known as the Grandfather Clause.³⁶

Oklahoma's first Governor, Charles M. Haskell, called the state legislature into special session in 1910 with the aim of passing a constitutional amendment that would disfranchise as many black voters as possible. The Amendment required a potential voter to be able to read and write a portion of the Oklahoma Constitution, unless that voter had ancestors who were eligible to vote as of January 1, 1866. The hope was that by tying voter eligibility to the narrow window between the ratification of the 13th Amendment on December 6, 1865, and the extension of black suffrage with the Military Reconstruction Acts of 1867, virtually all black Oklahomans would be disfranchised. The state gladly imperiled the votes of poor whites along

³⁶ Buck Colbert Franklin, *My Life and an Era* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997) Kindle, 145-147 and Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 25.

with blacks as both were perceived to be linked to the Socialist Party. Ironically, the proposed amendment brought blacks and Socialists closer together. Black Republican leaders and members of the Socialist Party worked together and claimed that the amendment was an “unconstitutional effort to rob black people of the ballot.” The amendment still passed.³⁷

Emboldened by the amendment’s passage, registrars in some parts of the state refused to allow African Americans to vote whatsoever. In state court, black lawyers fought the amendment for five years before appearing at the highest court in the land. The Supreme Court case arose from Kingfisher, Oklahoma, where white registrars Frank Guinn and J. J. Beal refused to allow African Americans to register, much less vote. Prompted by militant black Oklahomans, the Federal Government sued Guinn and Beal for violating the Fifteenth Amendment in Federal District Court in 1913. Importantly, the case marked the first time the national office of the N.A.A.C.P. filed a brief with the court. Oklahomans had finally gotten an ally off the sideline.³⁸

Meanwhile, the State of Oklahoma, flush with the power of its legislature, remained determined in their attempts to disfranchise African Americans and dangerous whites. Before the Supreme Court handed down the *Guinn* decision invalidating Oklahoma’s “Grandfather Clause” as unconstitutional in 1915, the state acted again. The changes of 1914 were partially inspired by the election of six socialists to the legislature. The third governor, Robert L. Williams called for a literacy test as a back stop if the Grandfather Clause Amendment should be ruled unconstitutional. The proposed law qualified voters if they had voted – or been eligible to do so – in 1914. If citizens had not been eligible before 1914, they could qualify by registering to vote

³⁷ Ibid. and Jimmy Lewis Franklin, *The Blacks in Oklahoma*, 21-22.

³⁸ Jimmy Lewis Franklin, *The Blacks in Oklahoma*, 22 and Buck Colbert Franklin, *My Life and an Era*, 145-147.

between April 30 and May 11, 1916. Failure to register during the official period resulted in a permanent voting ban. The proposed new law proved very unpopular in the state. So much so, that Governor Williams tried to bribe local black newspapers to write in support of the law that would make it harder, if not impossible, for blacks to vote.³⁹

Designers of the literacy test measure hoped to get around constitutional challenges by having the law apply to everyone. After the measure failed at the ballot box, the Oklahoma legislature simply passed the measure over the objections of voters, and an eager governor signed into law one year after the Supreme Court ruled the Grandfather Clause unconstitutional. In addition to disfranchising African Americans and poor whites, the legislature hoped the measure would stem black migration into the state and check the growing power of black Oklahomans. The law stayed on the books until 1939. Although the *Guinn* decision did not change much for black Oklahomans in practice, they considered it a major victory. They were from Oklahoma, a state who, with local black lawyers and local black funds, delivered the first civil rights victory at the Supreme Court to which the NAACP could rightly lay claim.⁴⁰

Closing Ranks

Black Oklahomans, like those throughout the United States, adopted W. E. B. DuBois' "closed ranks" stance toward supporting the World War I effort. In addition to failing to secure African Americans an equitable share of wartime benefits, in Oklahoma "closing ranks"

³⁹ Randy Krehbiel *Tulsa 1921: Reporting a Massacre* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019) 26; Clara Luper Collection, "Notes for Roscoe Dunjee Book," Writings of Clara Luper, Box 58, Clara Luper Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. [hereafter Luper Book Notes]; Jimmy Lewis Franklin, *The Blacks in Oklahoma, 22-24, 28* and Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 93.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

represented an abandonment of the successful strategy of forcing the federal government to protect black rights. "Closed ranks" stood in direct opposition to Oklahoma's successful pursuit of statist solutions enacted and supported by the federal government. Closing ranks is, at base, an inherently anti-statist ideology that stopped and eroded hard fought victories won through cooperation between black Oklahomans and the federal government.

When the United States entered World War I on April 6, 1917, African Americans debated about supporting the war effort. Leaders like A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen opposed black support for the war as the United States had yet to treat African Americans as full citizens. W. E. B. DuBois, in *The Crisis*, the official publication of the NAAP, argued that African Americans should "close ranks" and set aside their "special grievances" for the duration of the war. DuBois believed black support for the war would garner support for full black citizenship. Roscoe Dunjee supported DuBois' view of World War I as a crucial opportunity for African Americans. In the *Dispatch* Dunjee highlighted the wages of patriotism. "Men do not sacrifice in vain, grasp now your responsibilities when they are freely offered and you shall also grasp your every-right for the two are linked and tied together, the time to convict a man of your right to justice and fair play is to help him when he needs you most." The conflict's urgent need for labor created an opening for black citizens to enter the industrial workforce and secure better conditions than manual, domestic, or agricultural jobs offered in the South. Dunjee believed irrefutable proof of African Americans demonstrating patriotism during wartime would create a change in the social status of his community following the war.⁴¹

⁴¹ Cornelius L. Bynum, *A. Philip Randolph and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010) Kindle, 67-69; W. E. B. DuBois, *The Crisis*, vol. 16, no. 3 (July 1918), 111; Thompson, "Little Caesar of civil rights," 55-57 and "Citizens Honor Drafted Men," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, November 2, 1917.

Writing on September 21, 1919, in the editorial “What the American Negro Expects Out of the World War,” Roscoe Dunjee noted the primary focus of *the Oklahoma City Black Dispatch* going forward would be the average black citizen and his or her post-war opportunities. “The black boy who has returned from France will land down South with a mind and brain that riots in imagination, that effervesces and bubbles over with new ideas and thoughts.” To make these visions tangible, African Americans throughout the United States needed new and better leadership willing and capable of developing successful interracial partnerships and to “subordinate personal ambition for race elevation.” Roscoe Dunjee became that leader in Oklahoma.⁴²

At an event honoring black soldiers, Dunjee reminded his audience why black participation and patriotism mattered so much during World War I.

Men do not sacrifice in vain, grasp now your responsibilities when they are freely offered and you shall also grasp your every-right. For the two are linked and tied together, the time to [convince] a man of your right to justice and fair play is to help him when he needs you most. . . We must marshal our strength to gain our recognition in more than the mere dirty, ill-paid labor of the past.⁴³

In July of 1918, the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch* reported on a parade honoring black service members. An estimated 5,000 paraded in honor of the 170 draftees. Banners in the parade made clear the pride African Americans felt as a part of the war effort and their expectations for equal citizenship rights as a result. Banners included “There is a Trail of Black Blood from Bunker Hill to France; We Haven’t Produced a Traitor in 300 Years; Can they Fight –

⁴² Dunjee Roscoe, “What the Negro Expects From The War,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, September 28, 1919 and Thompson, “Little Caesar of civil rights,” 55-57.

⁴³ “Citizens Honor Drafted Men,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, November 2, 1917 and “Forty-two Black Girls Work in Factory,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, October 12, 1917.

Ask Pershing,” and “We are Fighting for Higher ideals of America, Not for the Savages of Georgia, Tennessee or Texas.”⁴⁴

Black Oklahomans registered for the draft, bought war bonds, and devoured any news of black troops.⁴⁵ Oklahoma City’s black community feted black soldiers whenever possible. Once, when black lieutenants passed through Oklahoma City via rail, black citizens hosted an event said to be “sparkling with brilliancy and charm transcending all previous social efforts ever attempted before in the state of Oklahoma.” On April 5, 1919, the *Black Dispatch* bragged the lieutenants “were college men from the best universities.”⁴⁶

On some levels, black Oklahomans did see benefits from their involvement with the war effort. For example, forty-two black women were hired in an Oklahoma City factory that had previously been a lily-white establishment. The manager went so far as to assure black reporters that his factory considered African Americans citizens who were “due a place.”⁴⁷

Even in the earliest days of American involvement in World War I, however, some white Americans had no interest in advancing black citizenship. In Oklahoma City, African Americans had to fight to be represented on the County Council of Defense. Blacks in Chickasha dealt with several issues in 1918. Two black soldiers became ill while being transported by rail through the town. White doctors in Chickasha refused to treat the men inside the building, and instead,

⁴⁴ “Negroes in Monster Parade,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, July 19, 1918.

⁴⁵ “Negroes buy \$55,000 worth of Liberty Bonds,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, April 12, 1918; “Oklahoma Boys Reach France,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, June 28, 1918; “Lieut. Corbett Tells of France,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, August 23, 1918; “Okla. Boy Dies in Action,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, August 23, 1918; “Do Your Manly Duty, Register!,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, September 6, 1918; “Negroes Put \$45,400 in Bonds,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, October 11, 1918 and “At Dead Man’s Hill,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, January 31, 1919.

⁴⁶ “Oklahoma City Banquets Colored Lieutenants,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, April 5, 1918.

⁴⁷ “Forty-two Black Girls Work in Factory,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, October 12, 1917.

kept them in a shack behind the city hospital. Members of the black Red Cross were refused access to them for the duration of their hospitalization. In March of the same year, Ivy League educated First Lieut. Chas A. Tribbett was removed from the train at Chickasha because he had been given a berth in a whites only Pullman car in Jim Crow Oklahoma.

Because of these events, and countless others across the country, Oklahomans quickly realized that closing ranks had been a sham. America's patriotic bargain made with African Americans was not in good faith. In a scathing editorial in 1918 titled "Keep the Hell Fires Burning," the *Black Dispatch* highlighted what had become obvious, "thousands of black mothers" sent their sons to defend the United States and the United States "failed to protect them" at home. What should have been an integrated war effort on the home front, where black and white citizens worked together, turned out to be a hellscape where conditions could worsen. Too often the home fires were fueled by black bodies. Lynchings were so common during World War I in Oklahoma a local writer speculated that "about all there is left for the black boy and girl to sing of the national anthem [was] 'Land where my fathers died.'" Things got worse when black soldiers returned from Europe and whites redoubled their efforts to maintain white supremacy. Across the South, returning Black soldiers were beaten, tortured, and lynched. As Dunjee described, "think of it. Men's eyes gouged out with hot irons, their bodies shot into thousands of pieces, clubbed, beaten and stamped into the earth in the land of the Free and the home of the Brave." In 1919 alone, nine black soldiers were lynched in the state and Black Oklahomans followed the racial atrocities around the nation during the Red Summer.

The power of Jim Crow became even more apparent in the aftermath of the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921.⁴⁸

The Tulsa Race Massacre

The 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre violently and definitively reinforced the failures of closing ranks in the minds of black Oklahomans. It also marked another turning point in strategy for African Americans. Instead of destroying Greenwood and the will of its citizens, the Race Massacre forged a collective spine of steel. In the aftermath, blacks did not leave the city or the state, rather they reverted back to their successful statist solutions from before World War I. In this way, the Massacre is the most important event to the long-term success of civil rights in Oklahoma through World War II and beyond.

On May 31, 1921, Dick Rowland, an African American working in downtown Tulsa, stumbled into, or stepped upon, Sarah Page, a white woman, while entering an elevator. This accident led to the largest verified incident of racial violence in American history and the willful destruction of Greenwood, the African American district in Tulsa, at the hands of white citizens. Whites had long been threatened by African American success. When blacks had the audacity to be more successful than their white counterparts, white supremacists worked to erode black success. In Tulsa and throughout the state, there were plenty of economically successful African Americans toward which jealous whites could direct their anger. By 1920 there were at least three black millionaires in Oklahoma, and several individuals worth over \$100,000. In Tulsa

⁴⁸ "Jim Crow: Democracy: Black Troopers Suffer in Filth at Chickasha," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, February 22, 1918; "Police Arrect Black Lieutenant," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, March 8, 1918; "Federal Investigation Starts at Chickasha," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, March 8, 1918; "Keep the Hell Fires Burning," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, May 24, 1918; "We Want the Right to Vote," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, October 18, 1918 and "Nine Negro Soldiers Lynched," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, January 2, 1920.

blacks benefited from a booming oil industry, and the service economy it generated. The environment produced many wealthy black residents.⁴⁹

After statehood, with the coming of segregation in Oklahoma, Greenwood did even better. Unable to shop at most white owned stores, the black dollar repeatedly circulated in the community. Citizens of Greenwood were early advocates of not buying where they could not work. At one point, African Americans did so well in Greenwood “it became fashionable for men to dangle \$20 gold pieces from their watch chains.”⁵⁰ Black success in Oklahoma, and Greenwood in particular, continued to draw African Americans in search of opportunity from across the United States.⁵¹ As a result of this paranoid jealousy and racism, white citizens of Tulsa lamented their perceived plight and organized themselves into racially violent groups as they had done since statehood. Mary Elizabeth Jones Parish, a 1921 survivor, remembered white mobs determined to blow “to atoms and ideals, no less than [the] mere material evidence” of black civilization and success in Greenwood.⁵²

After two days of looting and burning, Greenwood lay in ruins. Over a thousand homes were destroyed along with black hospitals, and all black-owned businesses. The two largest black newspapers, the *Tulsa Star* and the *Oklahoma Sun* were destroyed. As Roscoe Dunjee put it, only “the charred, smoking ruins of what was once the finest business district that progressive Negroes had in the United States” remained.⁵³ Losses exceeded \$2,500,000. Total

⁴⁹ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 22, 169; Johnson, *Black Wall Street 100*, IX, 29-31; Krehbiel *Tulsa 1921*, 20, 28.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Johnson, *Black Wall Street 100*, IX.

⁵² James S. Hirsch, *Riot and Remembrance: the Tulsa Race War and Its Legacy* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2002) 1 and Johnson, *Black Wall Street 100*, X, 23, 85.

⁵³ Alfred L. Brophy, *Reconstructing the Dreamland: The Tulsa Race Riot: Race, Reparations, and Reconciliation*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2003), 29, 170; Edward L Carter, *The Story of Oklahoma Newspapers, 1884-1984*,

number of dead is unknown, however, the Salvation Army hired black gravediggers to dig a total of 120 graves for black victims. Unknown numbers also died when black homes were burned. Finally, there is an “unconfirmed rumor” that there were two or more truckloads of black bodies dumped in the Arkansas River.⁵⁴

Instead of breaking the spirit of African Americans in Oklahoma and causing a mass exodus out of the state – as hoped – the perpetrators of the massacre, instead, galvanized black militancy throughout the state. Towns with large black populations – Tulsa, Oklahoma City, Muskogee, McAlester, Chickasha – led civil rights activism to force change that reverberated nationwide. Activism developed the aftermath of the massacre aided in the reconstruction of Greenwood, tied the citizens of Oklahoma to the NAACP, and created the framework for a massive fundraising apparatus for civil rights court challenges going forward.⁵⁵ Race Massacre survivors took up the mantle of militant leadership from 1930 to 1950.

June 3, 1921, two days after the riot, the Colored Citizens Relief Committee of Tulsa, reminded black Americans that the burning of Greenwood could happen anywhere and that the importance of organization and activism had to be everyone’s job regardless of where tragedy occurred.

We are thousands in numbers, homeless, absolutely clothesless (sic), and dependent upon charity. The fault is not wholly ours, we have done our best under the circumstances, but we are unable to save our homes or repair our losses without help from the outside world. Our committee is desirous of restoring our independent status as businessmen, housekeepers and residents.⁵⁶

(Western Heritage Books, Inc., 1984), 187-189 and “Police Drag Women Behind Motor Cycles,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, June 3, 1921 (quote).

⁵⁴ Johnson, *Johnson, Black Wall Street 100*, XIII.

⁵⁵ “Will You Help?,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, July 22, 1921; “What Have You Done?,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, August 26, 1921 and “Tulsans Thankful For Aid,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, October 13, 1921.

⁵⁶ “To the Negroes of Oklahoma and to the Negroes of United States,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, June 3, 1921 and “The Rebuilding Tulsa Movement,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, March 16, 1922.

Greenwood citizens immediately determined to rebuild and white Tulsa immediately tried to stop them. “Such a district as the old must never be allowed in Tulsa again. It was a cesspool of iniquity and corruption,” blasted the *Tulsa Tribune*. City officials wanted to take advantage of the district’s proximity to rail lines by converting it into an industrial park. African Americans were the only thing blocking this plan. The city created onerous new fire codes that, if enacted, hoped to make rebuilding Greenwood impossible due to the added expense. Son of an all-black town, Buck Colbert Franklin, had been practicing law in the area since before statehood. He stepped forward and legally blocked the city from implementing changes to the fire ordinances.⁵⁷

Even as the ashes of Black Wall Street smoldered, African Americans in Oklahoma and throughout the nation saw the riot as a turning point, a clarion call, a warning of change. Walter White saw triumph for African Americans, even in the aftermath, and a warning for white ones:

There is a lesson in the Tulsa affair for every American who fatuously believes that Negroes will always be the [meek and] submissive creatures that circumstances has forced them to be during the past 300 years. Dick Roland was only an ordinary boot black with no standing in the community but, when his life was threatened by a mob of whites every one of the 15,000 Negroes of Tulsa, rich and poor, uneducated and illiterate was willing to die to protect Dick Roland. Perhaps America is waiting for a nationwide Tulsa to wake her.⁵⁸

By 1925, Greenwood was ready to be on the national stage again. Buck Colbert Franklin organized an effort to host the National Negro Business League conference that year. Tulsans, white and black, needed an image boost, he reminded city hall. “Since the Tulsa riot, Oklahoma [has] been misrepresented before the bar of public opinion. Folk think that the unfortunate

⁵⁷ Johnson, *Black Wall Street 100*, 43, 75-76, 79; *Black Wall Street 100*, 79-85 and Krehbiel, *Tulsa 1921*, 80.

⁵⁸ Walter White, *the Nation* 29, 1921 in *Black Wall Street 100*, XII-XIII.

incident, that was heralded around the world, is representative of . . . this splendid state.” White officials were desperate to change the national view of Tulsa as a “racial hellscape.” Franklin secured the funding need for the event. The conference impressed. The parade, reported to be the largest “ever seen in Oklahoma,” extended almost three miles in length. Delegates marveled at the Greenwood’s revitalization in just four short years. Booker T. Washington, among others, could not fully express their amazement and pride.⁵⁹

Black Oklahomans, led by Tulsans, used the National Negro Business League to restart black migration into Oklahoma. The *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, in an editorial published on the opening of the conference, encouraged attendees to move to Oklahoma and bring others with them. It promised a progressive agricultural haven for blacks wanting out of the South.

There is no state South of the Mason and Dixon line where the black man can find a more liberal atmosphere of freedom and tolerance than in Oklahoma. Look about you while you are in Oklahoma.

You men of the South who must first fertilize your-soil before you make your feeble gesture at a crop, should wander over into our fertile valleys. Oklahoma is the ideal spot for the progressive black men of the South who are hunting new locations. Those whom we entertain this week are in reality in “The Land of Fair Gods.” Our hills and valleys offer the biggest opportunity in America to the live, wide-awake hustling black man. Tell the folk who did not come what you found in Oklahoma. Or, better still, don’t go . . . tell the folk back home that your new address is OKLAHOMA.⁶⁰

E. L. Goodwin and Amos T. Hall

Black leaders devoted the decade after the 1921 Massacre to rebuilding their organizations and honing their civil rights strategies to get back to the level of militant success

⁵⁹ Johnson, *Black Wall Street 100*, 88-89; “On to Tulsa! And the Nat’l Business League,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, January 22, 1925; “Tulsa to Stage Big Parade Thursday; Moton and Holsey Arrive,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, August 20, 1925 and “Oklahoman’s Welcome,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, August 20, 1925.

⁶⁰ “Oklahomans Welcome,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, August 20, 1925 and “Oklahoma Charms League Delegates,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, August 27, 1925.

they had developed by 1915 but lost when they abandoned statist approaches by “closing ranks” during World War I. During the 1920s and 1930s, a new group of African Americans stepped forward to lead civil rights efforts and activism in Oklahoma. E. L. Goodwin and Amos T. Hall were the two most important new race leaders to emerge in Tulsa. As World War II loomed on the horizon, a renewed and militant Greenwood stood ready to use the FEPC to guarantee black jobs. Born in 1902, E. L. Goodwin pursued the American Dream, long before it included African Americans. He graduated from Fisk University in 1925, with a degree in business administration and returned to Tulsa where he owned several businesses, including a tailor shop, shoeshine parlor, and a beer garden before becoming a newspaper publisher. He built his enterprises and his community from the ground up. Following the riot, Goodwin pieced together Greenwood and set on the path for a more equal future.⁶¹

Goodwin published Tulsa’s largest black newspaper, *The Oklahoma Eagle*. It arose from the ashes of the *Tulsa Star* and the *Oklahoma Sun* after both were destroyed in the massacre.⁶² Theodore Baughman, publisher of the *Sun* bought the remains of the *Tulsa Star* after his onetime mentor, A. J. Smitherman, fled Tulsa after the state blamed him for starting the violence in 1921. Baughman began printing *the Oklahoma Eagle* within months of the disaster. The paper had solid, but safe, coverage after the riot. An unsurprising reaction from a publisher whose previous paper was destroyed for the perception of begin militant. The stance also made sense considering there were several post-1921 papers that did not survive for long. Boring as it

⁶¹ Nudie Eugene Williams, “Oklahoma: Genesis and Tradition of the Black Press, 1889-1980,” in *The Black Press in the Middle West, 1865-1985*, ed. Henry Lewis Suggs (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996), 268; Carter, *The Story of Oklahoma Newspapers*, 189 and *The Oklahoma Eagle*, August 28, 1952.

⁶² Brophy, *Reconstructing the Dreamland*, 170. Carter, *Story of Oklahoma Newspapers*, 187; Suggs, “Introduction,” 6; Williams, “Oklahoma Genesis and Tradition,” 268 and *Ibid*.

may have been in comparison to its peers, *the Oklahoma Eagle* survived whereas all other post-1921 black newspapers “lived extremely short and catastrophic lives.”⁶³ What set the *Eagle* apart from its short lived competitors was its militancy and ability to inform and educate its readership about civil rights activism and motivate public support and engagement, all skills crucial to utilizing the FEPC.

Goodwin believed the *Eagle’s* bland coverage, its inability to respond to negative articles written by Tulsa’s white press, and its failure to provide meaningful racial uplift could not remain the status quo. He first tried to purchase the paper from Baughman in 1933, however, he was denied several times. Baughman did not want his newspaper to be taken over by the militant and outspoken Goodwin. Undeterred, Goodwin asked Charles Roberts and O. B. Graham, Sr. to purchase the paper with his money in 1936. The secret arrangement worked; Baughman sold to the veteran reporters he trusted unaware Goodwin would secretly call the shots. The arrangement became clear when Goodwin assumed full editorial and publishing control of the paper when Baughman died in 1937.⁶⁴

E.L. Goodwin’s *Oklahoma Eagle* immediately reverted to the militant style of A. J. Smitherman and the *Tulsa Star* pre-1921 massacre. He believed the most sacred duty of a black publisher must be to create change and improve the race. This sentiment is reflected in the paper’s motto: “We Make American Better When We Aid Our People.” As publisher of the now crusading *Eagle*, Goodwin became, according to historian Nudie Williams, one of the “most

⁶³ Brophy, *Reconstructing the Dreamland*, 170; Carter, *The Story of Oklahoma Newspapers*, 189; Hirsch, *Riot and Remembrance*, 149; Franklin, *Blacks in Oklahoma*, 34; J. Harvey Kerns, Director, National Urban League: A Study of the Social and Economic Condition of the Negro Population of Tulsa, Oklahoma (Tulsa: National Urban League, 1946), 26 and Williams, “Oklahoma Genesis and Tradition,” 281.

⁶⁴ Carter, *The Story of Oklahoma Newspapers*, 189 and “Theo. Baughman Dies at Tulsa,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, July 8, 1937.

influential black journalists in Oklahoma history.” Under Goodwin’s leadership the paper listed that its primary duty was to report on and provide support to the African American community of North Tulsa. By 1938 the *Eagle* readied to make good on its motto’s promise. It had expanded facilities, circulation, and number of employees. Goodwin steered it through the end of the depression and had placed it in a position of influence and authority as the citizens of Greenwood began to be buffeted by the winds of war.⁶⁵

If the *Eagle* pushed black Tulsans forward, the local branch of the NAACP, as headed by attorney Amos T. Hall, provided the behind-the-scenes pull. Called a man of “steely resolve and quiet determination,” Hall used those attributes to lead African Americans in battles for civil rights until his mysterious death in 1971. During World War II his legal mind translated into a straightforward strategy that depended upon the legal system as the best method for civil rights progress.⁶⁶ Through his involvement with the NAACP, Hall connected local organization and activism with nationwide race work. He led the Tulsa branch for eleven years, worked as the attorney for the State Conference of Branches, and served on the National Legal Committee of the NAACP.⁶⁷

Hall, like so many, moved to Greenwood from the deep South to have opportunity and a life free from the harshest ravages of Jim Crow. He arrived in Tulsa from Louisiana in 1921, the year of the Massacre.⁶⁸ Hall first worked as a church janitor where he came into possession of an old set of law books that caught his interest. He began studying law at night, on his own.

⁶⁵ Carter, *The Story of Oklahoma Newspapers*, 189.; Williams, “Oklahoma Genesis and Tradition,” 279, 281 and *The Oklahoma Eagle*, August 28, 1952, 1.

⁶⁶ Gene Curtis, “Only in Oklahoma,” *Tulsa World*, 3/18/___, Vertical Files, Tulsa Historical Society.

⁶⁷ Unknown, “Hundred Attend Final Rites of Judge Hall,” 11/18/71, Tulsa Historical Society.

⁶⁸ The exact date Hall arrived in Tulsa is unknown.

Soon he served as Justice of the Peace, an appointed position. It did not require one to be an attorney. In 1925, Hall, a self-taught lawyer, was admitted to the Oklahoma Bar.⁶⁹ He led black Oklahomans toward civil rights equity in several ways, most notably his work with the NAACP. At the local level, Hall worked with mutual aid societies, fraternal organizations, and civic ones like the Greenwood Chamber of Commerce he founded with E. L. Goodwin. Amos T. Hall was also the most important and highest-ranking Prince Hall Mason in Oklahoma, and for large periods of time, in the United States. He held the rank of a 33rd degree Mason and served as the Grand Master of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Oklahoma for 31 years and president of the national Conference of Grand Masters for 18 years.⁷⁰

His faith in the law and the strength of individuals working together for the good of the race never wavered. Everyone had a role to play in the community, in civil organizations and social clubs, in funding drives and letter writing. As Hall said:

Even one person is not powerless against those who fight change in this life. Even one person can help to right the wrongs of life and even change the course of history. This change, if our nation is to survive and our democracy to continue, will not be [affected] through violence. It will come only through education and changes in the attitudes and the hearts of men.⁷¹

Hall's commitment to community activism, legal guidance, and NAACP connections – combined with E.L. Goodwin's *Eagle* – made the Tulsa area a force to be reckoned with on the World War II home front. As a result, black Tulsans had widespread success using the FEPC as tool with which to advance wartime opportunity and civil rights.

⁶⁹ Gene Curtis, "Only in Oklahoma."

⁷⁰ Unknown, "Hundred Attend Final Rites of Judge Hall."

⁷¹ Ibid.

Roscoe Dunjee

Just as new race leaders came on the scene in Tulsa between the 1921 Massacre and World War II, Oklahoma City also embraced new leadership. Publisher of the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, Roscoe Dunjee, however, was vastly more important and influential. In fact, Dunjee was arguably one of the most important members of the entire NAACP, equaled only by Thurgood Marshall and Walter White in the 1930s and 1940s. He published *the Oklahoma City Black Dispatch* and directed the statewide NAACP as president of the Oklahoma Conference of Branches. Dunjee connected the state branches to NAACP headquarters in New York and black Oklahomans to the FEPC during World War II.⁷² Dunjee's far-reaching influence within the state and nation uniquely positioned him to be a transformative civil rights leader. By 1940, Dunjee had made Oklahoma the crown jewel of the NAACP. His organizing work was unmatched within the United States as was his fundraising ability for legal challenges. Dunjee, a newly converted Democrat, constantly reminded blacks in Oklahoma that there were pathways to equal rights, and they all ran through the Democratic-controlled federal government. In his keynote address at the 1940 National Colored Democratic Association, he proclaimed "Democratic party is the ship, all else the sea." He pointed to the efforts of New Deal Officials to give African Americans "justice and fair play" in employment rights and opportunities. Meager as the efforts may have been, at least Roosevelt and the Democrats seemed to be doing something for black citizens. Roosevelt used federal assistance and intervention to create opportunities and protections

⁷² Luper Book Notes.

wherever the national government held sway through the FEPC and other New Deal initiatives.⁷³

Dunjee's father was a central figure in African American leadership circles thanks to his travels with the black church and his involvement with historically Black colleges and universities. Whenever he traveled, John William Dunjee cultivated a salon-like atmosphere where black intellectuals debated politics, African American opportunities, and activism. In her unpublished biography of Roscoe Dunjee, Clara Luper described the Reverend Dunjee as someone who always "wanted and sought the company of intelligent people with whom, he might discuss the problems of politics and reconstruction." This atmosphere instilled in Roscoe a respect for black political leaders and the social responsibility for which they stood.⁷⁴ When the family lived in Minneapolis in 1892, Frederick Douglass, in town for the Republican National Convention, paid a visit. Nine-year-old Roscoe sat on his lap throughout the evening as his father and Douglass talked well into the night. When it came time for Roscoe to go to bed, Douglass gave him a silver dollar and promised to return to visit again soon. The next morning, Roscoe awoke fascinated by the night's events.⁷⁵

Roscoe Dunjee never lost his obsession with abolitionists and the quest for racial justice after the Douglass encounter. In this way, Douglass, and other early race leaders shaped Roscoe's stance on many things. Especially his views on the importance of interracial cooperation on race work, the need to create good paying jobs and educational opportunities,

⁷³ Luper Book Notes and Roscoe Dunjee, "Keynote Address at the National Colored Democratic Association," Chicago, 1940 in Thompson, "The Little Caesar of civil rights," 110.

⁷⁴ Buck Colbert Franklin, *My Life and an Era*, 116; Thompson, "The Little Caesar of civil rights," 35 and Luper Book Notes.

⁷⁵ Franklin, Buck Colbert, *My Life and an Era*, 116 and Luper Book Notes.

and the importance of strong black leadership. He believed leaders had a responsibility to fiercely embrace their leadership potential and create change. One quote from Douglass particularly resonated with him. “What have we to fear? Shall we fear opposition? No. Shall we fear prejudices? No. Poverty? No, not here. What we have to fear is tame submission to an unreasonable and relentless prejudice. The question is what shall we do?” Dunjee determined he would answer that question in Oklahoma.⁷⁶

Following his father’s example, Roscoe Dunjee devoted each Oklahoma City Saturday night to intellectual discussions and debates. Wherever he went – the streets of Oklahoma City, inside black homes, businesses, and churches – he debated all comers be they black, white, or Native American. These Saturday evening salons honed Dunjee’s communication skills as they created a name for him. His rhetorical skill eventually made him one the most important black leaders in the United States.⁷⁷

September 1917, Dunjee expressed frustration with local leadership. “There is a condition of disorganization existing among the Negroes of Oklahoma City that does not obtain anywhere else in Oklahoma.”⁷⁸ His venture into leadership, and his self-serving criticisms of other race leaders, was not always greeted warmly. Many community members applauded him, but old guard leadership often felt slighted by Dunjee’s willingness to rock the boat and forge his own path. Clara Luper labeled these men as “Mr. Vicious. . .the man who never thinks of race interest, but of self-glory.”⁷⁹ Dunjee believed black leaders in Oklahoma City were not

⁷⁶ Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 488-494 and Luper Book Notes.

⁷⁷ Clara Luper, Roscoe Dunjee book notes.

⁷⁸ Thompson, “Little Caesar of civil rights,” 55-57.

⁷⁹ Ibid and Clara Luper book notes.

resolute enough in their pursuit of civil rights. This uncertainty caused trouble, division, and apathy to the point of inaction. He noted “there is no discounting the fact that this condition is reacting daily to our detriment and sorry and yet we, all of us, are wondering, ‘what the trouble is.’”⁸⁰

Although these different groups had often worked together successfully thus far, Dunjee argued that they were hindering success by diluting resources and thus weakening the strength of the community. Writing in December 1920, Dunjee noted:

The Negroes in Oklahoma City have been making rapid progress for the past few years because of the harmony within their organizations and their relations with one another, but if we are to continue, we must . . . stamp out two things . . . individualism and overlapping in organization authority. The issue stands out sharp and plain. We can only advance properly with fixed policies. Sporadic, unregulated, mass meetings will avail nothing, but will bring certain disaster.⁸¹

Dunjee knew a strong NAACP presence, with him at the head, would solve the leadership problem.

State Conference of Branches

In 1931, Dunjee, with the assistance of the national NAACP, organized all Oklahoma branches under a state NAACP conference. The conference was the brainchild of Roscoe Dunjee and the first such state organization within the NAACP. He wanted to organize everyone under the umbrella of the NAACP to ensure maximum results for community money and effort. Everyone likely belonged to more than one leadership group already, but they needed a central organization. Together they would improve the lives of African Americans from farmers and

⁸⁰ Thompson, “Little Caesar of civil rights,” 55-57.

⁸¹ Thompson, “Little Caesar of civil rights,” 62-66.

reverends like his father in “Indian Territory” to Walter White and Thurgood Marshall at NAACP headquarters. Dunjee would lead the way to the modern civil rights movement.

Before his ultimate success in 1931, Dunjee formed a state organization wide organization of the NAACP in 1920 without an endorsement from the national office. Only four branches attended the conference – Enid, Wewoka, Oklahoma City, and the all-black town of Boley. Although the first incarnation of the State Conference of Branches fizzled, Dunjee had been elected state organizer. No longer did blacks have to wait for a representative from the national NAACP office to come to Oklahoma to form branches. Dunjee had positioned himself as a middleman between Oklahoma and the national headquarters. This is the same role Dunjee served in World War II for black Oklahomans as they navigated the FEPC and sought wartime opportunity.⁸²

The Tulsa Race Massacre was the watershed moment of the relationship between Oklahoma and the NAACP. As soon as word of the disaster reached Oklahoma City, Dunjee immediately went to Tulsa as a representative of the NAACP and began organizing relief. Dunjee, using the *Black Dispatch*, took the opportunity to highlight the importance of Oklahomans playing an active part in the NAACP.

As soon as the news of the Tulsa Riot was hurried to the world, and the NAACP learned of our suffering and distress, like a true father, this Association came to our rescue with funds for legal protection and relief of the people of Tulsa who were made homeless and helpless . . . The thousands of Tulsa Negroes feel grateful indeed to know that they have such a kind and loving “father” as the NAACP to help them in this their hour of greatest need and distress and shall always think of the NAACP as “The Father of the American Negro.”⁸³

⁸² “Oklahoma Organizes State Wide NAACP,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, April 23, 1920 and “State Conference of Branches,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, April 23, 1920

⁸³ “Tulsans Thankful for Aid.” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, October 13, 1921.

In 1931, Dunjee received the endorsement of the national office for the creation of the State Conference of Branches. In a politically shrewd move, Dunjee gave NAACP leaders in New York credit for his idea of developing a State Conference of Branches. “The national officers of the NAACP are to be commended for this new move to harness state work over the nation.” The column was an attempt to placate national headquarters and reassure other race leaders in Oklahoma that the state conference plan had the approval of national leaders. At the organizing session in 1931, with national branch coordinator William Pickens present, Dunjee’s first act as president of the State Conference of Branches was to collect funds from Oklahoma branches for the defense of the Scottsboro Boys. The handling of the Scottsboro Boys’ defense – or lack thereof from the NAACP – was major point of contention between Dunjee and Walter White. With the state conference created, however, Dunjee now had the autonomy and authority to speak out and demand action from NAACP leaders on behalf of the Scottsboro Boys. Going forward, his avowedly militant and outspoken style of race leadership forced the national NAACP into action. From 1931 to 1954, Dunjee played a major role in setting the agenda for the NAACP, whether the national leadership liked it or not.⁸⁴

For example, the same editorial page – from May 14, 1931 – in which Dunjee praised the national office for the State Conference of Branches, he excoriated them over the Scottsboro Boys in an editorial titled “The Conservative NAACP.” Dunjee complained the hesitancy of national NAACP officers to become involved with the Scottsboro Boys made the

⁸⁴ “A State Organization for Defense,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, May 14, 1931; “Plan to Attend the McAlester Meeting,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, October 6, 1945; “State NAACP Conference Plans Bold Attack Upon Educational Inequalities in Sooner State,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, November 10, 1945; and Marilyn Kay Troupe, “Newspaper Presses for Survival,” *The Oklahoma Eagle*, November 2, 1978 and Jimmy Lewis Franklin, *The Black Oklahomans*, 52-54.

association look weak as it bolstered the International Labor Defense (IDL). The editorial further proclaimed that NAACP leader Walter White, when he claimed the NAACP had been earnestly working on the case from the beginning, only indicted the ineffectiveness of the organization because the IDL had achieved so much more in the same amount of time. African Americans – and the Scottsboro Boys – most needed, decisive action on their behalf and the IDL was the only group providing that. Dunjee encouraged Walter White, and the NAACP, to stop letting blacks suffer because the group feared being associated with Communists. “What does it matter whether God, the devil or Communists save those helpless black boys down there in Alabama?” Dunjee vowed, that with the creation of the Oklahoma State Conference of NAACP branches, Oklahomans would act. They would no longer have their hands tied “by the Uncle Tom attitude” of the national NAACP. As Dunjee derisively asked, “whoever thought that anything with which DuBois was connected, would join the ranks of the Uncle Toms?” The appeal ended by further entreating Walter White and other national NAACP officials to veer from steering the organization into conservative – and timid – waters.⁸⁵

Despite national officers’ fears of communist connections and their hesitancy to make moves that could be considered too militant, Roscoe Dunjee’s outspoken style and aggressive pursuit of equality no matter the consequences, resonated with members of the NAACP, especially black ones living in the South. Oklahoma City won the right to host the 25th Anniversary Conference of the NAACP in 1934, against the wishes of national leaders. At the national conference in 1933, it was known that Dunjee felt Oklahoma City – as the vanguard of the organization – should host the 1934 conference and feature the Oklahoma State

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Conference of Branches as the model for the future of the organization. Members of the “Committee on Time and Place” endorsed Atlantic City before the floor vote. Dunjee objected to Oklahoma City not being selected by the committee. He rose, in general session, and gave a “stirring appeal” for Oklahoma City. He challenged, “bring [the] convention to a liberal southern state” and you will “be carrying the battle line of the association to a section of the United States where the Negro has actual battles to fight.” The power of the address and the uncomfortable truth that the NAACP was, at that time, a majority northern organization, fighting battles carried the day. Oklahoma City won with a unanimous vote.⁸⁶

The *Black Dispatch* explained to arriving delegates the direction the NAACP should take in the coming year. In short, be like Oklahoma. Local black leaders should fearlessly engage in race work on the local level. He argued power, funding, ideas, plans, etc. should be generated at the grassroots level, especially in the South. The national organization had to be responsive to what the branches wanted rather than what the officers assumed was best for the branches. Furthermore, the organization needed to realize the communists and International Legal Defense were creating space for the NAACP by being so radical.

The Association can do far more good by taking their discussions into the South than by holding conferences in the North. The violent radicalism of Communism is forcing America at last to give the association its rightful place in the program of social readjustment.”⁸⁷

Hosting the National Conference exceeded the expectations of the State Conference of Branches. The event educated Oklahomans about the importance of their activism to African

⁸⁶ “Oklahoma City Gets Next NAACP Meet,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, July 6, 1933; “25th Annual NAACP Meeting in Okla. City June 27 – July 1,” *The Negro Star*, April 20, 1934; “Critical Survey Of Negro’s Plight At NAACP Conference,” *The New York Age*, June 23, 1934; “Segregation is Rapped by White At NAACP Meet,” *Washington Tribune*, July 5, 1934 and “Co-Operation with the Lynchers,” *Negro Liberator*, July 7, 1934.

⁸⁷ “The National Conference,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, June 30, 1934.

Americans throughout the United States. Additionally, William Pickens stayed in Oklahoma for a two-week speaking tour to help organize new branches. Ten new branches were started during the tour.⁸⁸

Hollins v State of Oklahoma (1935)

The influence of the Oklahoma State Conference of Branches continued to grow. The conference initiated and won two major supreme court cases in the 1930s. *Hollins v State of Oklahoma* (1935) which made all-white juries unconstitutional and *Lane v Wilson* (1939) which finally settled the “grandfather clause,” issue by ruling the voter restrictions passed by Oklahoma after the decision in *Guinn v United States* (1915) were unconstitutional. The *Hollins* and *Lane* victories validated the statist approach of black Oklahomans. Going forward, black leaders worked to do two primary things to advance civil rights in Oklahoma. They built strong organizations and used them to secure support from the federal government. Activism in Oklahoma following the 1921 Massacre depended upon federal supports for progress. The FEPC augmented the existing statist strategy.

The first of these cases originated in December 1931. Jess Hollins, an African American male from Creek County, allegedly raped 17-year-old Alta McCollum, a white woman. Officers jailed Hollins at Sapulpa, the county seat. On December 20, District Court Judge Gaylord Wilcox convened the trial in the basement of the courthouse without giving proper notice or allowing Hollins any legal counsel. The court quickly convicted him even though the illiterate Hollins had to sign his written “confession” with his thumbprint. Wilcox scheduled the execution for March

⁸⁸ “America’s Greatest Race Fighter, William Pickens, to Arrive in Tulsa May 16,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, May 10, 1934 and “State Conference of Branches, NAACP, Holds Memorable Session in Oklahoma City,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, June 6, 1935.

11, 1932. When asked about the extraordinary circumstances of the trial, Judge Wilcox said he felt convicting and sentencing as quickly as possible avoided a potential lynching or riot.⁸⁹

The case of Jess Hollins did not initially garner much attention or support from the national NAACP office. At this time, the organization remained hesitant to involve itself with case in which a guilty conviction could result in bad publicity or associating the organization with African Americans viewed as unsavory. The same argument had been used when the Scottsboro Boys abandoned by the NAACP, and were, instead, represented by the International Labor Defense. The ILD took cases like the Scottsboro Boys, and that of Jess Hollins, as a way to strengthen relations with African Americans, and therefore, increase the membership and presence of the American Communist Party in the Southern United States. The effort also included a push for black unionization.⁹⁰

Dunjee criticized the lack of involvement by the NAACP as a dereliction of duty that burnished the image of the American Communist Party. The Young Communist League held a rally at Oklahoma City to raise funds for the Jess Hollins defense. To Dunjee, a man invested heavily in community organizing via the NAACP, this was an embarrassment. He believed the Communist Party acted out of self-interest rather than racial cooperation and had no real commitment to Jess Hollins. Days before his scheduled execution, friends of Hollins proved Dunjee right by begging him to intervene on Hollins' behalf. The International Labor Defense had been entirely unsuccessful in its attempts to prevent the execution from going forward.

⁸⁹ Thompson, "Little Caesar of civil rights," 70-75.

⁹⁰ Ibid. and Luper book notes.

Dunjee did not hesitate to step-up and personally hire attorneys to stall for time so Dunjee's long-planned defense of Hollins could finally be put in place.⁹¹

For the next three years, Dunjee used the *Black Dispatch* to raise funds from its readers for Hollins' defense on behalf of the Oklahoma Conference of Branches. Dunjee was proud, and rightly so, that the Oklahoma Conference of Branches did this on its own. As he had with World War I, Dunjee saw the Hollins case as an opportunity to further unify blacks in Oklahoma, and nationally. From 1932, to the resolution of the case, the *Black Dispatch* and its editor stressed that the community had to respond to all instances of injustice. An attack on one promised injustice for all. In an October 1932 editorial he noted:

Who it is whose face is black, who can say that he is immune from the same calloused, brutal treatment received at the hand of Oklahoma Courts by Jess Hollins? Who is it whose face is black who not a few moments from now [could] be facing prison walls and electrocution because of the sole crime of being black?⁹²

Readers were reminded of their stake in the Hollins Case and encouraged to focus on it so that, at least locally and regionally, the case would not be lost in the national publicity surrounding the Scottsboro case.

“There was no need [for black Oklahomans] to look outside the confines of the State of Oklahoma for a place to spend [their] strength. Right here in Oklahoma we have our ‘Scottsboro’ and it is right here that we should seek to strike a blow for liberty.” Hollins' new attorneys, paid for by Oklahomans, won a retrial based on the circumstances of the original conviction.⁹³

When the retrial began in 1934, the defense focused on the fact that African Americans were prohibited from serving on juries, and therefore had no chance of being judged by a jury

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Thompson, “Little Caesar of civil rights,” 70-75; “Jess Hollins Defense Fund,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, October 6, 1932 and “Jess Hollins Fund List of Contributors,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, July 19, 1934.

⁹³ Thompson, “Little Caesar of civil rights,” 70-75.

of their peers. This strategy had been utilized by the Scottsboro attorneys and had been urged by Dunjee in his early efforts to get the NAACP to take the case. Hollins' attorneys asked that the jury be disqualified because it did not include blacks. District Judge Mark Bozarth overruled the motion and empaneled the all-white jury that swiftly convicted Hollins again and scheduled his execution for May 11, 1934.⁹⁴

The Criminal Court of Appeals in Oklahoma City heard the jury argument and rejected it saying, "the defendant had a fair trial" and the verdict and death sentence were "just." April 29, 1935, the Supreme Court of the United States heard the case. Oklahoma Attorney General Mac Q. Williamson represented the State. Charles Houston, the former Dean of Howard Law School, headed the defense on behalf of Hollins and the now involved national offices of the NAACP. The unanimous decision read, "the evidence in this case shows that the petitioner, a Negro is entitled under the Fourteenth Amendment to a new trial because of the exclusion of Negroes from jury service solely on account of their race and color." The same rationale had been applied to the Scottsboro Boys' case. Dunjee was thrilled with the outcome. Even though the decision only awarded Hollins a new trial, Dunjee believed the legal playing field in Oklahoma, and the United States, had been forever changed. Unfortunately for Jess Hollins, innocent as he likely was, the Supreme Court victory did not alter his situation. He received another trial where he was convicted again and sentenced to life in prison where he died in 1950.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Thompson, "Little Caesar of civil rights," 70-75.

⁹⁵ Thompson, "Little Caesar of civil rights," 75-78.

Lane v Wilson (1939)

Three years after the beginning of the Hollins case, the Oklahoma NAACP finally got a chance to resolve the Grandfather Clause issue. In 1934, Iverson W. Lane, mayor of the all-black town of Red Bird, sued the Wagoner County registrar and a precinct head after being refused the right to vote. Black attorney Charles Chandler, from Muskogee, represented Lane at the district, appellate, and Supreme Court levels. Chandler argued the registration law violated the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. The Supreme Court Agreed and reversed a 10th Circuit Court of Appeals decision that rejected a \$10,000 suit brought by Lane. By the next election in 1940, the Conference of branches had legal teams in place to assist African Americans in Wagoner County – and throughout the state – with voter registration. After the Lane decision, Oklahoma lawmakers made no further attempts to restrict black voting; unlike counterparts in many southern states Black Oklahomans had few obstacles to the ballot.⁹⁶

The suit was a success, but it had been a long and costly twenty-five-year journey. Oklahoma's African American residents paid for this legal battle themselves. All funds used to prosecute both *Guinn* and *Wilson* were exclusively raised by black Oklahomans through efforts by Oklahoma's black newspapers and the states' ever growing and increasingly powerful network of NAACP chapters. By 1934, black Oklahomans were leading the nation in civil rights battles. Dunjee had been awarded the NAACP Merit Award in 1935 and placed on the NAACP Board of Directors in 1936. Black Oklahomans had taken three cases before the Supreme Court and won all of them. Each victory is a landmark decision and a milestone in America's Civil

⁹⁶ Hannibal Johnson, *the Sawners of Chandler: A Pioneering Power Couple in Pre-Civil Rights Oklahoma* (Fort Worth: Eakin Press, 2018), 25; Franklin, *the Blacks in Oklahoma*, 24-28 and Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 93.

Rights Movement because they expanded and protected the rights of African Americans in the judicial system and their right to vote. Black leaders in Oklahoma were thrilled at their record of beating Oklahoma at the federal level and it was not lost on them that *they* were the ones to finally convince the NAACP to finally file a brief on a case before the Supreme Court in *Guinn* (1915). Soon, national NAACP involvement would be commonplace following the Oklahoma organizational model.⁹⁷

War Comes

During the Great Depression, black Oklahomans relied on the power of their organizations to continue to build networks that financially floated the national NAACP as it struggled to thrive with high African American unemployment. Race leaders believed it was the responsibility of black Oklahomans to support and direct the national civil rights effort and NAACP when it could not do so itself. The *Hollins* and *Lane* decisions occurred during the Great Depression and are a testament to effectiveness of the statist and organizational strategies.

On December 22, 1932, in the depths of the Great Depression, Roscoe Dunjee wrote an editorial called "Help the NAACP" in which he argued black Oklahomans were the only people in the United States who could steer the organization through the difficult years ahead. His logic explains how the NAACP in Oklahoma continued to thrive while the organization struggled overall. He noted the depression had left the NAACP struggling for money, a problem

⁹⁷ "State NAACP Wins Signal Victory in Wagoner Co. Disfranchisement Case," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, May 27, 1939; "Wagoner County Citizens Getting Ready to Vote," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, May 13, 1940; "Dunjee Named to Receive 1935 Merit Award by the NAACP," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, June 20, 1935; "Dunjee, Evans, Walden and Lightner Formally Named as Directors of the NAACP," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, January 16, 1936; Franklin, Jimmie Lewis, *the Blacks in Oklahoma*, 24-28; Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 93 and Johnson, *the Sawners of Chandler*, 25.

Oklahoma's branches did not have. Dunjee explained, "the *Black Dispatch* speaks largely to Negroes who do not live in the desolate and depression-ridden East and North. We speak to black men who, if they will and desire, are able to reach into their pockets and take out from \$1 to \$10 and pour it into the life blood of the NAACP." Dunjee also plead with readers to step-up and keep the organization afloat. The writing further demonstrates how Oklahoma had and would continue to use the state conference structure to become a financial powerhouse that could fund multiple cases all the way to the Supreme Court with minimal financial assistance from the national office.⁹⁸

The editor also reminded black Oklahomans of their duty to support an organization that had long supported them:

In 1921, when Tulsa lay torn and bleeding from an awful race riot, it was the NACCP which spent \$3,646.54 for the relief of the Negro citizens of Tulsa. Part of this amount was spent in the courts to defeat an ordinance passed by the city of Tulsa and designed to prevent Negroes from rebuilding their burned homes. Negroes of Oklahoma must agree that this great militant organization has in many specific instances spent hundreds of dollars to protect the citizenship rights of black men in the state of Oklahoma.⁹⁹

By the signing of Executive Order 8802 in June of 1941, race leaders in Oklahoma were, perhaps, more prepared to fully utilize the FEPC to advance civil rights than any other group in the United States. The state had funded three successful Supreme Court cases and continued to grow and rapidly add branches as their success grew. In addition to fundraising and generating civil rights cases, the state NAACP structure made information sharing and the rapid education of large numbers of people about the FEPC relatively easy. Led by race men like Roscoe Dunjee,

⁹⁸ "Help the NAACP," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, December 22, 1932.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

Amos T. Hall, and E. L Goodwin and with the ability to harness the reach of two black newspapers, black Oklahomans entered the World War II era determined to be given their fair share of wartime opportunities. They would not let the disappointments of World War I be repeated. Black Oklahomans grabbed the opportunity presented by World War II and the FEPC and ran with it. In 1945, at war's end, Oklahoma had an astounding eighty-three NAACP branches in a state with just over 168,000 African Americans.¹⁰⁰ In so doing, they led the nation ever closer to equality. One defense job at a time.

¹⁰⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940*, 794, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-volume-2/33973538v2p5ch8.pdf>. (accessed July 31, 2021).

The FEPC in Tulsa

In November of 1942, F. H. Carson, a personnel manager at Douglas Aircraft in Tulsa, placed an urgent call to Lewis Clymer, minority placement specialist, War Manpower Commission for Oklahoma. Carson complained about ongoing public harassment of Tulsa Douglas by the local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and *the Oklahoma Eagle*. He focused on “adverse publicity . . . launched at [Tulsa Douglas] by a [black] weekly newspaper concerning [Douglas’] slow progress toward acceptance of [black] trainees for employment.” In a thinly veiled threat, he suggested that a continuance of this type of reporting would “retard the program . . . for the employment of [blacks] at the Douglas plant.” The personnel manager asked Clymer for help in “subduing undue criticism until adequate time [had been given Douglas] to perfect the upgrading program.”¹⁰¹ Carson’s call revealed that finally, the efforts of race leaders in Tulsa were making inroads at Douglas Aircraft. Efforts to exert pressure at the local level in combination with federal pressure to expand employment opportunities and civil rights for black Oklahomans had reached high gear.

Black activism in Tulsa has been the norm since before statehood, and, following the Tulsa Race Massacre in 1921, it transformed into a militancy unequalled in the United States. The Supreme Court victories in *Guinn, Lane, and Hollins* demonstrated the success black Oklahomans had in prompting federal intervention to protect black citizenship rights in territorial days and after statehood. The long period of Reconstruction and the federal court

¹⁰¹ Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, “War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports,” November 23, 1942; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211 and Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, “War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports,” November 25, 1942; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

strategy prepared black Oklahomans to view the FEPC as a tool to be used with other strategies to secure employment opportunities during World War II. They realized the FEPC could be used for incremental gains but were under no illusions the agency would be a magic wand that would fully remove workplace discrimination. The FEPC represented a new steppingstone in a lengthy and ongoing struggle for equality.

The legacy of closed ranks failures and the Massacre of 1921 made black Tulsans more clear-eyed, more militant, and more determined that black citizens would fully participate in – and benefit from – the World War II effort. Benefit they did. Large numbers of African Americans, men and women, were hired at defense facilities in the Tulsa area. Douglas Aircraft, in addition to unskilled labor, employed 815 African American in skilled positions by the end of the war. At DuPont Ordnance Works, blacks were employed in similarly large numbers in all employment categories, unskilled, skilled, professional, technical, and managerial. Only Spartan Aircraft Company stopped the FEPC from making inroads, the facility only had eight total black employees at the end of the war, all in maintenance positions.¹⁰²

Even before Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802 in June of 1941, Tulsans pursued defense contracts and the opportunities they offered. Black Tulsans, led by massacre survivors Amos T. Hall, E. L. Goodwin, Horace Hughes and J. T. A. West, fought aggressively for their community's right to train and work in skilled industrial positions. Hall served as the president

¹⁰² Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, "War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports," October 24, 1942, Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211; Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, "War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports," July 24, 1943; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211 and G. R. Cantwell, Manager, Oklahoma Ordnance Works and G. W. Crockett, Service Superintendent to Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, Region IX, February 22, 1944; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

of the Northeastern Division of the Oklahoma State Conference of Branches and served on the National Legal Board of the NAACP. By the time, the FEPC began operation in 1941, race leaders had already been threatening employers with the prospect of federal involvement and oversight, something the defense industries sought to avoid. The three largest defense contractors in the Tulsa region – Spartan Aircraft Company, DuPont Ordinance Works, and Douglas Aircraft – all would have gladly excluded African Americans if it meant not rocking-the-boat with state and city officials, local unions, and their own employees. African Americans were prepared and did rock-the-boat. They prevailed in securing wartime jobs, including skilled positions, for African Americans.

In the Tulsa area, black leaders successfully used the FEPC to advance employment opportunities at these facilities in several ways. Before the agency's creation World War II, which began in Europe in September 1939, had already raised expectations among black Oklahomans. The promise of jobs, and federal assistance in getting those jobs, increased black support for construction bonds. At each of these early steps, however, African American job seekers were thwarted by local officials and union leaders. The FEPC's creation, however, gave black leaders an important tool, creating space for activism and militancy to successfully challenge local white leaders when they attempted to block black employment. Black leaders often went straight to the top union and corporate officials for an acceptable solution. These officials promised full support for war effort, including the integration of black workers. The war depended on it. Records suggest these high-ranking leaders were strongly committed to the effort, but as historian Andrew Kersten argued, there were often large discrepancies between

the official policies of companies and unions and how local representatives enacted, or ignored, those policies.¹⁰³

With the FEPC as a backstop, black leaders in Tulsa forced local unions to comply with the promises of their leaders. The same proved true with defense facility personnel officers, training officials, and state and local government leaders. Race leaders made it known to opponents of black labor that they could either have a good relationship where all parties cooperated with FEPC policies, or race leaders could use the FEPC as a threat and a metaphorical cudgel with which to harangue them publicly in the pages of *The Oklahoma Eagle*. The most extraordinary aspect of the FEPC's history in Tulsa is the role *the Oklahoma Eagle* played. When Douglas Aircraft Company tried to outlast and ignore FEPC representatives, the black newspaper, published by Race Massacre survivor E.L. Goodwin, went to work. The paper so publicly documented the mistreatment of blacks workers at Douglas, with reports of abuses and broken promises by company officials that the company begged the FEPC to become involved. The scenario is representative of a no-holds-barred approach to workplace integration. FEPC representatives, Tulsa NAACP leaders, and *the Oklahoma Eagle* were a lethal combination for segregationists. By war's end defense facilities in the Tulsa area , with the exception of Spartan, conceded to FEPC mandates and offered black workers training and employment in skilled positions.

Hoping to recover the city's flagging depression era economy, Tulsa's white leadership sought to take advantage of World War II. As Courtney Ann and Glen Vaughn-Robertson noted

¹⁰³ Andrew E. Kersten, *Race, Jobs, and the War: The FEPC in the Midwest, 1941-1946*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000) 4-7.

in *City in the Osage Hills*, “a combination of loyalty and opportunism spurred the Tulsa business community to launch feverish quests for defense contracts and to establish other war-related industries.” The city passed resolutions and sent delegations, led by Tulsa oilmen like J. P. Getty, to Washington, D.C. The boosters argued Oklahoma deserved defense industries. In the early 1940s, “Oklahoma ranked fifteenth in per-capita income [and] twentieth in population, but only fortieth in federal arms-related money.” The boosters were successful with this argument and by the end of the war the city and surrounding areas boasted several defense facilities including Spartan Aircraft Company, Douglas Aircraft, and DuPont Ordinance works.¹⁰⁴

Tulsa passed a \$750,000 bond issue to purchase land for the Douglas project in 1941. Because the *Oklahoma Eagle* does not survive in any format before 1942, there is not a record of black community debates about support. The ballot by a large margin. Just after breaking ground to begin construction of the Douglas plant, discrimination reared its ugly head. The *Eagle* immediately launched what it would later characterize as a “year-long fight” to ensure that black carpenters gained employment at Douglas during construction.¹⁰⁵ Again *The Oklahoma Eagle* joined forces with Amos T. Hall and the Tulsa NAACP to call for both construction workers and after the plant opened, skilled positions on the assembly line. The *Eagle’s* partnership with the NAACP was well placed. Jimmie Lewis Franklin considered the Tulsa office to be crucial in the effort to “persuade businesses such as Douglas Aircraft to

¹⁰⁴ Mike Buckendorf, *Tulsa: the War Years* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2011) 7; Angie Debo, *Tulsa: from Creek Town in Oil Capital* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1943) 113; *A Study of the Social and Economic Condition of the Negro Population of Tulsa, Oklahoma* (Tulsa: Urban League) 1945-1950, Tulsa City-County Central Library Vertical Files and Courtney Ann and Glen Vaughn-Robertson, *City in the Osage Hill: Tulsa, Oklahoma* (Boulder: Pruett Publishing Company, 1984) 143-144.

¹⁰⁵ “Increased Unity of Negroes Bright Note in the Year 1941,” *The Oklahoma Eagle*, January 10, 1942.

reexamine hiring policies and to concentrate on fair employment.”¹⁰⁶ In *A History of the Black Press*, Pride and Wilson also argued that the strength of the NAACP’s “nationwide organization,” when linked with the Black press on a local level allowed newspapers like the *Eagle* to wield outsized influence in their communities.¹⁰⁷

DuPont Ordinance Works

The Ordinance works in Chouteau is the biggest overall success story of the FEPC in Oklahoma. Initially, familiar barriers plagued efforts to integrate the workforce. Local union and company officials did not meet the standard espoused by their national counterparts. Company managers at DuPont were also concerned the location of the plant – between the white Mayes County towns of Chouteau and Pryor, 40 miles east of Tulsa – would make it impossible to hire African Americans. Local union representatives encouraged this belief. Again, black leaders from Tulsa and their counterparts in the FEPC went to work and got results. The facility employed black workers in all employment categories from janitorial to management. By January 25, 1943, 5.9% of DuPont’s total employees were African American, an impressive accomplishment for a facility located in a town and county with .01% and 1.6% black populations respectively.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Jimmy Lewis Franklin, *Journey Toward Hope: A History of Blacks in Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), 212.

¹⁰⁷ Pride, Armistead S., and Clint C. Wilson II. *A history of the Black Press*. Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1997, 155.

¹⁰⁸ Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, “War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports,” February 25, 1943, Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211 and U.S. Census Bureau, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940*, “Composition of the Population, by Counties: 1940,” 826. <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-volume-2/33973538v2p5ch8.pdf>, (accessed July 28, 2021).

By April 1941, Mayes County newspapers were excitedly running headlines about a potential “big munition plant for Northeastern Oklahoma.” Later that month the *Chouteau Times Herald* noted the “government [was] planning to locate a multimillion-dollar smokeless powder plant, together with a shell loading and a TNT plant.” Throughout the spring and summer, the paper avidly reported on the deliberation process, and gradually the headlines became less speculative about the outcome. Reports were confirmed with an August 7, 1941, headline. It read, “\$51,000,000 Plant Comes to Chouteau.” In that article, the *Times Herald*, proudly announced the expected benefits of the decision, noting that the plant “expected to employ 20,000 workmen while under construction, and with 5,000 permanent employees,” after beginning operation.¹⁰⁹

Although DuPont officials had promised to open all employment categories to African Americans, Justin Tyler, a representative of the black-owned Universal Life Insurance Company, reported to Amos T. Hall that in a radio advertisement running in Tulsa, DuPont announced it sought “1000 white men.” In response to the advertisement the local NAACP organized a townhall meeting on January 17, 1942. Attendees voted to send a delegation to DuPont to directly inquire about the advertisement and the lack of jobs for African Americans. Three leaders of the Greenwood community undertook the mission. Two Race Massacre survivors

¹⁰⁹ Big Munition Plant For Northeast Oklahoma By Disney,” *Chouteau Times Herald*, April 10, 1941, 1; “Mayes County May Get Big Defense Project,” *Chouteau Times Herald*, June 5, 1941, 1; “Favorable Decision Expected For Powder Plant, Says Disney,” *Chouteau Times Herald*, July 24, 1941; “FDR to Choose Site For Plant: Reliable Source Claims Chouteau Will Finally Be Selected,” *Chouteau Times Herald*, July 31, 1941. - “Big Munition Plant For Northeast Oklahoma By Disney,” *Chouteau Times Herald*, April 10, 1941, 1; “Mayes County May Get Big Defense Project,” *Chouteau Times Herald*, June 5, 1941, 1; “Favorable Decision Expected For Powder Plant, Says Disney,” *Chouteau Times Herald*, July 24, 1941; “FDR to Choose Site For Plant: Reliable Source Claims Chouteau Will Finally Be Selected,” *Chouteau Times Herald*, July 31, 1941.

joined Justin Tyler on this mission: J. T. A. West, a teacher at Booker T. Washington High School and E. L. Goodwin, publisher of *the Oklahoma Eagle*.¹¹⁰

At their meeting with DuPont officials, the delegation stressed that the advertisement calling for “1000 White Men,” flagrantly violated the central tenant of Executive Order 8802. No racial discrimination should be tolerated in defense production. DuPont representatives claimed to support FEPC policies of integration, but they claimed to be unable implement said policies because of the attitudes of the nearby white towns of Chouteau and Pryor and the resistance local unions who were “successfully controlling the hiring process,” and blocking integration as a result.¹¹¹ The company said their earlier attempt to employ several” African American laborers during construction caused such an uproar they were “forced to transfer them to other locations.”⁴

The claim was probably untrue. When asked to offer specific numbers of men “hired and then transferred” and their names, DuPont refused to provide details.⁵ Second, if black laborers were hired and then transferred due to racial tension, *the Oklahoma Eagle* and the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch* would have reported it and Amos T. Hall or Roscoe Dunjee would have informed the national NAACP. There is no evidence of either.¹¹² The statistics DuPont *did* agree to produce noted that at present they employed approximately 7000 laborers on the construction of the facility. Of those, 5000 were from the immediate communities around the facility, this number included no African Americans. The remaining 2000 were workers from “foreign territory,” and 200 hundred of those were black. Plant officials used these “outsider”

¹¹⁰ “DuPont Officials Deny Race Discrimination at Chouteau,” *The Oklahoma Eagle*, January 17, 1942.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid and “Negro Job Seekers Should Apply Immediately, *Oklahoma Eagle*, January 17, 1942.”

totals to claim that when taking the plant's lily-white location into consideration they were meeting the "the traditional 10 percent" of jobs reserved for blacks.¹¹³

The 1940 Census of Mayes County listed a mere three hundred fifty-six African Americans. The group represented just 1.6 percent of the county. Additionally, Chouteau itself had only twenty-five black citizens making up less than one percent (1%) of the town's population.⁶ Pryor, reported *the Oklahoma Eagle*, contained no black residents. So, on the surface, DuPont's logic for not hiring more blacks seems mathematically feasible, however, as area African Americans would know, the situations was more complicated. The towns of Murphy and Mazie, had the first and third highest population of blacks in Mayes County and were located just 7 miles from the facility. So, although African American population numbers were a small percentage of Mayes County, they were concentrated near the facility. Additionally, several nearby towns contained sizable black populations. Wagoner, just south of the DuPont facility had 5,321 African Americans living within its bounds. Muskogee County, just south of Wagoner, boasted an even higher population of African Americans. The situation was local discrimination, not population statistics.¹¹⁴

The DuPont representatives also claimed they wanted to carry out the company's planned integration policies, but local government officials prevented this plan from moving forward. Specifically, the "location of the plant in a lily-white section around Pryor," made locals nervous. White county residents sought to extend their perceived racial purity into the

¹¹³ "DuPont Officials Deny Race Discrimination at Chouteau," *The Oklahoma Eagle*, January 17, 1942.

¹¹⁴ "Tulsa Fights Defense Discrimination," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, January 17, 1942, 4; Negro Job Seekers Should Apply Immediately, *Oklahoma Eagle*, January 17, 1942 and U.S. Census Bureau, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940*, "Composition of the Population, by Counties: 1940," 826. <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-volume-2/33973538v2p5ch8.pdf>, (accessed July 28, 2021).

workplace, claimed DuPont. Once again, the excuse lacked credibility. The Tulsa delegation, after hearing these explanations from DuPont officials, scheduled a meeting with Tom Harrison, the mayor of Pryor. Rather than confirming the DuPont reports, Mr. Harrison vehemently denied them and instead proclaimed, “we don’t give a [damn] how many Negroes are employed on that job, and we have never had any protest regarding those who have been working there.”¹¹⁵

When the Tulsa delegation returned and confronted DuPont managers with the mayor’s statement, they promised to do everything possible to hire more African Americans, up to 1000. DuPont told the delegation to encourage African Americans seeking employment to submit applications either in person or in writing. Going forward, they assured, the only barrier to employment would be the failure of a physical examination. Leaving the meetings at DuPont and Pryor armed with assurances that officials were at least vowing their support for further integration at the Chouteau facility, the black leaders turned their attention to preparing applicants.¹¹⁶

The January 17 townhall meeting that resulted in the delegation going to DuPont also featured O.C. Vindall, business manager of Local 1202. He spoke to the gathered assembly about different hiring practices at defense facilities and how those policies worked with union ones. He noted the Chouteau plant operated under a “preferential shop” arrangement. This meant the plant was supposed to give preferential treatment to union men, many of whom were African Americans and under Mr. Vindall’s purview. Due to the newness of any type of

¹¹⁵ “Tulsa Fights Defense Discrimination,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, January 17, 1942, 4.

¹¹⁶ Negro Job Seekers Should Apply Immediately, *Oklahoma Eagle*, January 17, 1942, and “DuPont Officials Deny Race Discrimination at Chouteau,” *The Oklahoma Eagle*, January 17, 1942, 1.

industry in and around Chouteau, officials at DuPont were allowed to hire local non-union men until a new union could be established. They were under no obligation to use union labor currently.¹¹⁷ Vindall could “only send men as specified by the contractor.”¹¹⁸ In spite of Vindall’s desire to help the black members of his union and his constant requests that more African Americans be given the opportunity to work at DuPont, hiring had yet to increase.¹¹⁹

Scarcely a week passed before dividends from the town hall meeting began to come in. As noted in an article from the January 21, 1942, *Eagle*, there had been a guarantee of more jobs at DuPont. Within a week of the meetings, twenty more blacks had been hired bringing the total to three hundred laborer positions. DuPont promised that “the number [would] approach a thousand within the next few days.” Laborers made \$40 per week. Early success at DuPont, however, did not include skilled positions for black workers, and certainly did not guarantee a workplace free of discrimination or equal treatment.¹²⁰

February 1942, evidence of continued shortcomings at DuPont emerged. On that day Lawrence Cramer, Executive Secretary of the FEPC, wrote to Foster Williams in Muskogee, Oklahoma. Cramer had gotten his name from Oklahoma Congressman Jack Nichols and was writing to inquire if Mr. Williams had been part of a group of African Americans fired from the DuPont construction project “solely” because of race.¹⁶ Mr. Williams responded that he not been part of the fired group but was the Muskogee NAACP Precinct Chairman. In that capacity

¹¹⁷ “Amos Hall Fights Discrimination,” Oklahoma City *Black Dispatch*, January 17, 1942, 1; Douglas Flamming, *African Americans in the West* (Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, 2009), 175 and Kerns, 22. And “DuPont Officials Deny Race Discrimination at Chouteau,” *The Oklahoma Eagle*, January 17, 1942, 1.

¹¹⁸ “DuPont Officials Deny Race Discrimination at Chouteau,” *The Oklahoma Eagle*, January 17, 1942, 1.

¹¹⁹ “Amos Hall Fights Discrimination,” Oklahoma City *Black Dispatch*, January 17, 1942, 1; Flamming, *African Americans in the West*, 175 and “DuPont Officials Deny Race Discrimination at Chouteau,” *The Oklahoma Eagle*, January 17, 1942, 1.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

he reached out to the congressman for support for his members. He noted that there were many more individual members of his NAACP branch being discriminated against, but most were too afraid to come forward.¹²¹

In April of 1943, Jesse Bradley, Thes Robbins, Henry Clay, Joe Mayo, William Bryant, Acie Winn, and Troy Newton complained about DuPont refusing to hire them because they were African American. The FEPC received the complaint, but it went nowhere because of limits to the power of the power of the agency. For a specific FEPC complaint to be acted upon, complainants had to list specific reasons they believed themselves to have been “denied employment solely because of race,” lived experience not being sufficient. They also had to provide the position and name of the individual who had discriminated against them. If possible, the name of the discriminator's boss should be included as well. These requirements, often discovered after the fact, killed several individual cases filed with the FEPC in Oklahoma for “insufficient information.”¹²²

The same fate met a letter of complaint from the Committee for the Right to Work of All Citizens in Vinita, Oklahoma. In their letter to President Roosevelt in August 1942, the group added to the accusations of discrimination at DuPont. They noted there were several African Americans in the area who wanted defense work so that they could “help in the war effort as well as provide a means of livelihood for themselves and their families.” Furthermore, the few who had been hired were called for work on a separate call from that of whites, likely a

¹²¹ Lawrence W. Cramer, Executive Secretary of the FEPC, to Foster Williams, February 27, 1945; Cases Closed: W-Insufficient Information: Foster Williams; Box 15 of 15; Non-Docketable Cases, 1943-1946; RG 228 and Foster Williams to Lawrence W. Cramer, Executive Secretary of the FEPC, March 28, 1942; Cases Closed: W-Insufficient Information: Foster Williams; Box 15 of 15; Non-Docketable Cases, 1943-1946; 228.

¹²² George M. Johnson, Assistant Deputy Director FEPC, to Jesse Bradley, April 28, 1943; Cases Closed B – Insufficient Information: Jesse Bradley; Box 7 of 15; Non-Docketable Cases, 1943-1946; RG 228.

reference to the DuPont call for black workers in 1942 after the Tulsa NAACP challenged company on its earlier calls for white workers. The committee closed with a patriotic call. They asked for “assistance from the National Administration in correcting a wrong that [was being done to] a group of fine American workers that [were] anxious to do their part in the war effort.” The letter from the FEPC only contained the usual admonishments that the committee should respond with specific evidence, including names of those who discriminated against them if they wanted the FEPC to act. Although the above complaints and letter went nowhere, they show how widespread community involvement was to use the FEPC to secure black employment. Elected officials, multiple NAACP branches, and community committees were committed to utilizing the FEPC as successfully as possible.¹²³

African Americans who were fortunate enough to secure jobs at DuPont soon learned discrimination would continue in their new workplace. On August 1, 1942, the *Eagle* reported that DuPont had issued an order to all black “workers to bring individual drinking cups if they wanted to drink water on the job.” White workers could – of course – use any drinking fountains they chose. The *Eagle* pounced on this report and quickly linked it to both unpatriotic whites and pre-Emancipation conditions for slaves and, by extension, implied DuPont was no better than 19th century slaveholders.

He Negro is entitled to the rights and privileges of an American citizen. Only as he is made to feel that he is being recognized as such can he make his maximum contribution to war production. Telling Negro workers that they must drink out of individual cups

¹²³ H. Thompson, Ralph T Faley, and Jeff Irons, Chairman, Committee for right to work of all Citizens, Vinita, Oklahoma, to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, August 14, 1942; Cases Closed I – Insufficient Information: Jeff Irons, Box 9 of 15, Non-Docketable Cases, 1943-1946; RG 228 and George M. Johnson, Assistant Executive Secretary, FEPC, August 24, 1945; Cases Closed I – Insufficient Information: Jeff Irons; Box 9 of 15; Region IX, Non-Docketable Cases, 1943-1946, RG 228.

while fountains were furnished for white workers was no greater humiliation than telling them they must drink from troughs, for the intent was to [humiliate].¹²⁴

Editor of the *Oklahoma Eagle*, Horace S. Hughes covered the situation in his editorial column as well. He noted that not only were drinking fountains still being segregated, but that “many [blacks were] being forced to walk a mile to toilets while comfortable restrooms [were] provided for White laborers.”¹²⁵ The segregated drinking fountains and toilets at DuPont were harder to overcome for the FEPC. The committee could only make recommendations as to the hiring of African Americans but had no oversight of discrimination within facilities. In Oklahoma City, Roscoe Dunjee and the NAACP were much more successful at convincing the FEPC that workplace conditions were essential to war production and integration, the heart of the committee’s mandate.¹²⁶

Just as before, negative publicity and organized pressure yielded results. In Lewis Clymer’s weekly report for October 24, 1942 – roughly six weeks since the *Eagle*’s most recent criticisms – he noted impressive progress at Dupont. The company planned to immediately hire 100 additional black workers which would bring the percentage of African Americans up to what Clymer called the appropriate “population ratio.” DuPont had opened several positions, some skilled, for African Americans. One unit in the “powder making operation” was scheduled to be turned over exclusively to African Americans workers including skilled laborers, janitors, supervisors, and foremen. Clymer also felt confident black women would be hired soon.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Horace S. Hughes, “Editor Speaks,” *The Oklahoma Eagle*, September 5, 1942, 8.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*

¹²⁶ *Ibid*.

¹²⁷ Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX; “War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports,” October 24, 1942; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

The progress largely happened after DuPont hired an African American man, Mr. A. Julien Lee, as a counselor dedicated to increasing the black employment. Lewis Clymer had suggested hiring such a counselor. It worked beautifully. Lee was originally hired as a chemist but the opportunity to promote black workers convinced him to leave the lab. Four black “college trained” women now worked in the onsite laboratory and DuPont searched for a clerical assistant for Lee.¹²⁸ Five months later the percentage of black workers had risen from “3.3% in November 1942 to 5.9% on January 25, 1943, an impressive number considering the small portion of black residents in the area. Additionally, seven women worked in technical positions in the onsite laboratory.¹²⁹ DuPont thanked Lewis Clymer for the suggestion and told him that having a counselor dedicated to integration worked so well they planned to hire a “[Black] Industrial Relations Counselor” at their new plant in Memphis.¹³⁰

Although the committee had no real powers of enforcement, it, through its mere existence, conveyed legitimacy upon the efforts of black leaders. The FEPC may not have been able to compel the hiring of African Americans but it required paperwork and reports and inquiries from national figures into local policies. It also provided a clear path for the average black citizen to communicate problems and seek answers to employment concerns. North Tulsa’s leaders quickly grasped that invoking the FEPC opened doors to meetings that had

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, “War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports,” February 25, 1943; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

¹³⁰ Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, “War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports, March 27, 1943; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211; G. W. Crockett, Oklahoma Ordinance Works, Service Superintendent to Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, February 22, 1944; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211 and U.S. Census Bureau, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940*, “Composition of the Population, by Counties: 1940,” 826. <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-volume-2/33973538v2p5ch8.pdf>, (accessed July 28, 2021).

previously been denied them. They used the idea of a federally backed, Roosevelt endorsed FEPC, to push their efforts further than ever before.

Douglas Aircraft

Along with DuPont, the behemoth of Douglas Aircraft had to be tackled. Facility managers preferred to look the other way to avoid anything that might slow the pace of aircraft production or agitate white workers. Therefore, if it came to refusing to employ blacks or placating racist whites, whites and uninterrupted production inevitably won the day. White Tulsans were aware of this tendency and took advantage of what they hoped were sympathetic officials. The pattern extended to training facilities, training classes, and some unions. There was, however, an advantage to challenging Douglas. As a massive company with multiple facilities across the United States it benefitted incredibly from defense contracts. It had much to lose should the company violate FEPC guidelines during World War II. The committee could recommend the federal government cancel contracts over FEPC violations. Furthermore, the Douglas only arrived in the city after gathering funding from local taxpayers – including black ones – and the federal government. Finally, *the Oklahoma Eagle*, made the difference. Their continual airing of dirty laundry Douglas desperately wanted to hide, eventually sent the company running toward FEPC compliance. At peak employment, Douglas employed over 800 African Americans in skilled positions, 150 of them were black women, offered paid training courses for blacks, and hired an African American manager dedicated to recruiting, interviewing, and hiring blacks.¹³¹

¹³¹ Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, "War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports," July 24, 1943; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211 and Lewis

Constructing the Douglas Aircraft Facility

Work on the Douglas plant began after the citizens of Tulsa – including the black ones – passed a \$750,000 bond issue, agreed to donate land, and build runways. Groundbreaking took place on May 2, 1941, followed by the formal dedication occurring a little over a year later August 15, 1942. Members of Tulsa’s African American community were hopeful that new opportunities awaited them at Douglas. This hope was anchored in two facts: as taxpayers, blacks were subsidizing the cost of the plant’s construction, and the plant construction began after Executive Order 8802 had been issued. Since the order made it illegal for defense contractors to discriminate against black workers, African Americans in Tulsa were equal candidates for construction work and, eventually, aircraft assembly work. Tenets of the FEPC, however, meant little to Manhattan Construction Company, the building contractor, or local construction unions.¹³²

The nation labor federations and international unions, like large corporations, adopted official policies of integration during World War II. The AFL and the CIO, along with their affiliated unions, announced support for efforts to hire black defense workers. The context of wartime needs forced even unions that heretofore had been entrenched segregationists to, at least, publicly to embrace integration in accord with the FEPC. The problem, as the DuPont situation illustrated, is that the commitments of those at the top did not necessarily lead to commitments at the local level. While union officials at the national and regional levels publicly

Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, “War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports,” May 8, 1943; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

¹³² Danney Goble, PhD., *Tulsa! Biography of the American City* (Tulsa: Council Oak Books, 1997), 175; Maureen Honey, ed., *Bitter Fruit: African American Women in World War II* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 37; Debo, *Tulsa*, 113; Vaughn-Robertson, *City in the Osage Hills*, 146 and “Peace Halts A-26 Production,” *Tulsa Douglas Airview News*, August 15, 1945.

embraced the hiring of African Americans, those in charge at the local level often used their positions to thwart integration at every turn. Management officials at DuPont Ordnance Works, Manhattan Construction, Douglas Aircraft and the Naval Ordnance Facility at McAlester, all reported that union influence at the local level stood as a barrier to integration in Oklahoma. In fact, Roscoe Dunjee claimed all African American labor problems in the state were due to unions. "The entire difficulty is one originating with union labor. Union labor has said [African Americans] shall not join white unions and that white unions alone shall control skilled employment." No matter how committed to employment integration national and regional union leaders were, local union officials and members were some of the most substantial obstacles to African American advancement during World War II.¹³³

Tulsa-based division of Manhattan Construction Company built the Douglas facility. Given their long history with the city, they were familiar with the legacy of the 1921 Massacre and ongoing segregation and discrimination issues. While the company used integrated unions for general construction work, skilled unions successfully blocked Manhattan Construction from employing skilled African American workers during a substantial portion of the construction of the Douglas facility. Specifically, Local 943 of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, an AFL affiliated union, did all they could to prevent Manhattan Construction Company from hiring black carpenters. When initially approached by Hall and Wade as to why only whites were being hired as carpenters, D. D. Layton, personnel manager for Manhattan and member of the white carpenter's local, feigned offense according to the affidavit. He then

¹³³ "Tulsa Fights Defense Discrimination," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, January 17, 1942 and Kersten, *Race, Jobs, and the War*, 1-7.

“reached for further excuses, the exact nature of which he refused to state, but which these complainants state to be grounded solely upon their race and color.” The complainants were Tulsans of “African descent [and] bonified voters and taxpayers.” After much stalling, Layton finally acknowledged the company required that employees be union members.”¹³⁴

The closed shop arrangement at Manhattan meant local unions, in effect, had the power to determine if African Americans worked on the construction project at all, especially when their efforts were aided by companies like Manhattan Construction afraid to anger their white union employees. If African Americans were prohibited from joining Local 943 of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters, Manhattan Construction could not hire them. Black carpenters attempted to join Local 943 but were summarily denied membership based on their race. Unable to integrate Local 943, they appealed to the regional organizer for the United Brotherhood of Carpenters, Judge Ed Warren, for help. Warren’s solution was to create segregated Local, #816. He hoped this would create a middle ground where the goals of national union officials could be met and local resistance to integration could not threaten wartime production through strikes or riots.¹³⁵

This too, was a major development in civil rights history. Although African Americans initially joined a segregated capacity, they were now union members, abided by union work rules, and subject to union protections. The creation of the segregated local also guaranteed future membership and eventual integration. Certain that any questions about their status as

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ John H. Bracey, Jr. and August Meier, eds., *Papers of the NAACP: Part 13: NAACP and Labor*, Amos C. Hall, President Tulsa NAACP and Primus C. Wade, “The United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, Local Union No. 816, Tulsa vs. Manhattan Construction Company, a Corporation,” August 23, 1941; Reel 13: Slide 117.

union members were now settled to the satisfaction of Manhattan Construction, members of Local 816 applied for work on August 15, 1941, were hired, told to return for work on the 18th.

Upon arrival, they “were told that the Employing Agency was not satisfied with their union cards.” Undaunted, the group returned with their official union charter to prove their group’s legitimacy and national union support.¹³⁶ At this point, D. D. Layton still refused to employ blacks. He claimed the segregated union to be illegitimate because they did not charge the same amount for membership and initiation fees as did the white union of which he was a member. The group again reached out to the regional official Judge Ed Warren. Warren told Layton that the differences in the fees charged by local 816 did not prevent the hiring of African Americans. Yet, Layton persisted in his refusal to refer African Americans for employment.¹³⁷

The first complaint against the union was filed as an affidavit with the offices of FEPC in Washington D.C., shortly after the establishment of the committee. Attorneys Amos T. Hall and Primus C. Wade, on behalf of Local 816 of the Carpenters union – the black local – accused Manhattan Construction Company of blocking the employment of African Americans because of race, a clear violation of the FEPC.¹³⁸ On October 6, 1941, FEPC official Robert C. Weaver, reported on the status of the union “situation” in Tulsa. He recently met with both carpenter’s locals and believed everything had finally been worked out. Unfortunately, he noted Manhattan

¹³⁶ John H. Bracey, Jr. and August Meier, eds., *Papers of the NAACP: Part 13: NAACP and Labor*, “FEPC Complaint about Douglas Carpenters and Manhattan Construction Company: United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, Local Union No. 816 versus Manhattan Construction Company, a Corporation,” Reel 13, Slides 117,118 and “Ban Lifted; Negro Carpenters Employed at Tulsa Bomber Plant,” *The Oklahoma Eagle*, November 22, 1941, reproduced from *Papers of the NAACP: Part 13: NAACP and Labor*, Reel 13, Slides 112, 113, 114.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ John H. Bracey, Jr. and August Meier, eds., *Papers of the NAACP: Part 13: NAACP and Labor*, “FEPC Complaint about Douglas Carpenters and Manhattan Construction Company: United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, Local Union No. 816 versus Manhattan Construction Company, a Corporation,” Reel 13, Slides 117,118 and “Ban Lifted; Negro Carpenters Employed at Tulsa Bomber Plant,” *The Oklahoma Eagle*, November 22, 1941, 1, reproduced from *Papers of the NAACP: Part 13: NAACP and Labor*, Reel 13, Slides 112, 113, 114.

Construction company did not need any carpenter's currently, but they had promised to hire a black crew – that would be segregated – the next time they needed more. Manhattan assured Weaver the crew would be hired very soon. The *Eagle* of November 21, 1941, announced the lifting of the ban on African American carpenters in Tulsa. It noted that eventually the FEPC had been contacted and asked to rectify the situation through “the proper [adjudication] measures.” Assisted by the FEPC and national union representatives, black activists and Local 816 had convinced Local 943 to drop all complaints. Within weeks a crew of ten black carpenters were placed on the Douglas construction site at a rate of \$1.25 per hour.¹³⁹ Black leaders quickly moved to build on the success they had with Manhattan Construction and the carpenters' union. The victory against the carpenters union changed the playing field in Tulsa. There are no other complaints against building trades unions originating in the city for the duration of the war. Additionally, other unions were broken by the momentum.

In January 1942, Amos T. Hall wrote to the Secretary of the NAACP, Walter White, to update him on the progress being made toward defeating segregated unionism in Oklahoma. The correspondence between the two offers a view into just how much World War II and the FEPC allowed the Tulsa branch to aggressively attack multiple unions related to the war. In January of 1942, Hall directed simultaneous integration efforts involving unions at Manhattan Construction, DuPont Ordinance Works and the ironically named Lily-White Dairy Company in Tulsa. Additionally, the Tulsa NAACP branch worked on efforts to unionize black plasterers and cement finishers.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ John H. Bracey, Jr. and August Meier, eds., *Papers of the NAACP: Part 13: NAACP and Labor*, Amos T. Hall, President Tulsa NAACP to Walter White, Executive Secretary NAACP, March 21, 1942, Reel 13, Slide 134, and Amos

D. D. Layton's defiance toward Judge Ed Warren, a regional official, is emblematic of the differences between national stated policies of integration and local power brokers committed to use their positions to segregate. Even in the face of a chartered black union, D.D. Layton tried overruling his own union leaders. The brotherhood also fought black carpenters in Chickasha, Muskogee, McAlester, and Oklahoma City in addition to Tulsa. Of unions in Oklahoma, the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America was by far the most determined to deny blacks skilled employment, but black activists were able to prevail with only a few exceptions.¹⁴¹

Training Trouble

Although the agitation to get carpenters employed during the construction phase of the Douglas plant was successful, it no way guaranteed that black workers would be hired once production began. The key would be to first completing job training. Those who did not support workplace integration created multiple barriers to training opportunities to prohibit blacks from working in higher-paying skilled positions. Roadblocks included no training facilities for blacks, onerous paperwork requirements, lack of instructors, and incorrect curricula. None of these

T. Hall, President Tulsa NAACP to Martin T. Dunkins, Executive Secretary, United Association of Journeymen, Plumbers and Steam Fitters, March 21, 1942, Reel 13, Slide 135 and Amos T. Hall, President of the Tulsa NAACP, "Memorandum," April 22, 1942, Reel 13, Slide 142 and Amos T. Hall, President of the Tulsa NAACP to Plumbers and Steamfitters Local Union, Tulsa, Oklahoma, April 22, 1942, Reel 13, Slide 143.

¹⁴¹ R. C. Alexander to Senator Josh Lee (OK), July 13, 1942; Cases Closed – A, Insufficient Information, Closed Cases, 1943-1945, Box 6 of 15; RD 228; George M. Johnson, Assistant Director FEPC to Eddie Anderson, October 12, 1942; Closes Cases Unions, Eddie Anderson, Box 6 of 15, Closed Cases, 1943-1945; RG 228; R.M. Jones, Business Agent Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of American, Local 2341 to Ed McDonald, Regional Director War Manpower Commission, Region IX, December 16, 1942; Cases Closed Unions, Regional Central Files, 1942-1945; RG 211 and "Negro Carpenters Unions Gets Charter," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, February 22, 1941.

obstacles applied to the training and hiring of white Tulsans. Aircraft assembly training began for whites by spring 1941 well before production started on August 15, 1942.

Black Tulsans, led by Amos T. Hall, pressured government officials at the federal, state, and local level for training centers devoted to aircraft assembly to be opened in Greenwood as early as spring 1941. On March 29, Mrs. Dorothy W. Isaac, a Greenwood resident and NAACP activist sent Oklahoma senator Elmer Thomas a letter. She expressed the need for training opportunities for African American youth. "Negro youth are not being accorded equal or even proportionate opportunities in National Defense. We urge you to take steps to put an end to such discrimination in order to insure national unity." Her patriotic language and specific request for action comports with other efforts by the citizens of North Tulsa. The same language is repeated by NAACP Secretary Walter White in his own letter to Senator Thomas a week later. The Senator's response suggests these letters were normal occurrences. In his reply, he acknowledges Mrs. Isaac's suggestions about the need for training opportunities and thanks her for the letter. "I am glad to have your viewpoint on this matter, and I hope you will write me at all times regarding matters of interest." The letters reveal an organized network of black activists in Tulsa pushing for wartime employment opportunities. It also shows a relationship with the national headquarters of the NAACP that promoted cooperation between the two locations, national and local.¹⁴²

¹⁴² Elmer Thomas, Senator, Oklahoma, to Mrs. C. H. Person, January 28, 1941; Folder 69, Box 22, Elmer Thomas Collection, Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center, Norman, Oklahoma.

Amos T. Hall wrote to Donald Douglas in July 1941, asking him to confirm the Douglas facility in Tulsa would hire black workers in skilled positions and let him know about obstacles to training skilled black workers.

Training courses for aircraft assembly work, sponsored by the Tulsa NAACP, were beginning August 10th and within the immediate area around Tulsa there were thousands of African Americans available for war work. A large portion of these men, Hall noted, had the “fundamentals which would make it [easy] for them to hold skilled positions” and they were eager to “play their part in national defense.” Hall told Douglas that local officials had made it clear that no training would be available for African Americans in this area unless the companies explicitly stated they would be hired as skilled workers. Hall notes, therefore, it is “necessary to have an expression as to the attitude of your company toward the training and employment of [African Americans].” Hall offered to meet personally with Douglas in California and signed off with a not so veiled threat. “An immediate answer will be appreciated so that, if unfavorable, we shall have ample time to submit the matter to . . . Washington” for further action.¹⁴³ Within weeks of the creation of the FEPC, Hall used the possibility of a federal inquiry to pressure Douglas to commit to hiring black workers, a commitment that was necessary to open up training opportunities. Unfortunately, Hall did not quote Douglas’ response in his letters to Walter White. Regardless, the letter to Donald Douglas exhibits the shrewdness with which he sought to influence the hiring of African Americans by using the FEPC as a motivational tool.

¹⁴³ NAACP – Paper 109, 110, 111 and John H. Bracey, Jr. and August Meier, eds. *Papers of the NAACP: Part 13, NAACP and Labor*, “Letter to Donald Douglas from the Tulsa Branch of the NAACP, July 31, 1941,” Reel 13, Slide 111.

Hall complained in January 1942, that Tulsa officials had still not received the proper federal requisitions for rent and equipment to set up training facilities for African Americans. Funds had supposedly been approved to open training centers in north Tulsa but no money for facilities or equipment had yet been allocated. The Greenwood community, however, took matters into their own hands and were providing training as best they could.¹⁴⁴ The January 24, 1942, *Eagle* noted classes, organized by black Tulsans, were now being offered Carver Junior High School – a segregated institution – for both men and women to begin learning the skills necessary to secure defense employment. The classes were hosted and funded by the citizens of Greenwood.¹⁴⁵

The practice of providing essential education and training for black Tulsans, by black Tulsans, had a long history. After the 1921 Massacre, the community operated an evening school for adults. They awarded certificates of attendance, diplomas, and certifications for basic trainings. These certifications were recognized in all black areas throughout the state. Courses included “Negro” history, Spanish, typewriting, woodwork and basic plumbing, carpentry, and mechanical skills. In 1942 alone, 600 hundred individuals attended night school. During the war years, north Tulsa also had to do its own segregated trainings for Civilian Defense and Red Cross with courses for “Home Care of the Sick” and “National Defense.” Greenwood’s twenty years of providing education for its citizens had prepared the community to provide opportunities for

¹⁴⁴ “Defense Classes to Be Sponsored by North Tulsa Branch YWCA, Oklahoma Eagle, January 17, 1942,

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

defense industry training available to African Americans looking for war work until federal assistance arrived.¹⁴⁶

Amos T. Hall, then president of the Northeastern Division of the Oklahoma Council of NAACP branches and the Tulsa branch, called a town hall meeting in early January 1942. *The Oklahoma City Black Dispatch* described an impassioned Amos T. Hall vowing that if an “honest-to-God effort [was] made to train Negroes for defense work” in Tulsa, courses would be installed in “forging, welding, and sheet metal.”¹⁴⁷ Over three hundred were in attendance. Among them were the most notable African American leaders in the state. In addition to Hall, North Tulsa and the local NAACP branch were well represented by E.L. Goodwin, publisher of *the Oklahoma Eagle*, representatives from segregated unions, heads of Ladies’ Clubs, and educational and business leaders. Roscoe Dunjee, publisher of *the Oklahoma City Black Dispatch* and president of the Oklahoma Council of Branches of the NAACP also attended in an advisory capacity.¹⁴⁸

At the meeting, black citizens sent a delegation to Washington, D.C., lead by Amos T. Hall, to secure funding for African American training centers. The attorney planned to stress the importance of Executive Order 8802, the FEPC, and the duty of all patriotic Americans to support the effort. The delegation proclaimed situations in Oklahoma were morally and socially wrong. Worst of all, they were un-American. Armed with a plan of action, the law, and written guarantees for federal funding from 1941, the Tulsans boarded a segregated train for

¹⁴⁶ “Defense Classes to Be Sponsored by North Tulsa Branch YWCA,” *The Oklahoma Eagle*, January 17, 1942 and “Evening School Starting,” *The Oklahoma Eagle*, September 1943.

¹⁴⁷ “Amos Hall Fights Discrimination,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, January 17, 1942, 1.

¹⁴⁸ “Negro Job Seekers Should Apply Immediately,” *The Oklahoma Eagle*, January 17, 1942; “NAACP Holds Mass Meeting to Discuss Discrimination in Defense Industry, January 17, 1942 and “Hats off to the Negroes at Tulsa!,” *The Oklahoma Eagle*, January 31, 1942.

Washington. Their tickets were purchased by the Greenwood community, members of the Negro Masters Plumbers and Helpers Association and the Negro Carpenter's Union Local 816 each donated fifty dollars.¹⁴⁹

As *the Oklahoma Eagle* noted, "thousands of whites [were] already training in Tulsa." Black Tulsans "wanted to know why [they] could not be given the same type and character of training." The group filed an FEPC complaint on August 23, 1941. In a subsequent letter to Walter White, Amos T. Hall advised he had "submitted to the proper officials of the Department of Education" the appropriate forms to requisition "rent and equipment for the training of [African Americans] for work in the National Defense industries, particularly the Bomber Plant at Tulsa [Douglas] and the Powder Plant at Chouteau [DuPont]." He added that training for defense positions should be open to African Americans soon. The completion of training courses would theoretically qualify trainees for employment. In January 1942 – five months after North Tulsa's FEPC complaint – the Department of Education claimed to have never received the requests for training funds, therefore, the requisition had not been filled and black Tulsans were to blame, according to the Department of Education.¹⁵⁰

The Washington delegates were successful. Officials at the Department of Education miraculously managed to locate the previously "missing" requisition and authorization to open training schools for black Oklahomans. As Roscoe Dunjee put it, the Tulsans "GOT ACTION NOW." As a result, North Tulsa received approval for four training shops. Tulsa had been

¹⁴⁹ "Tulsa fights discrimination," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, January 17, 1942 and "Amos Hall Fights Discrimination," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, January 17, 1942

¹⁵⁰ John H. Bracey, Jr. and August Meier, eds., *Papers of the NAACP: Part 13: NAACP and Labor*, Amos T. Hall, President Tulsa NAACP to Walter White, General Secretary NAACP, January 16, 1942, Reel 13, Slide 131.

assured of a pending “appropriation of \$12,747.30.” Training would take place at Berry’s Garage, which had already been rented for training purposes by the citizens of North Tulsa but had sat idle waiting for equipment funding. The garage would prepare individuals for work in welding, sheet metal fitting, and aircraft installation.¹⁵¹ Importantly, black Tulsans succeeded because of their organizational efforts at the local level and their connections in Washington D.C. Although successful in opening training facilities and securing work for skilled black carpenters, Tulsa’s black residents had miles to go before actually receiving training.¹⁵²

Additional hurdles to black war employment immediately sprang-up. Again, the problem lay in competing priorities at the national versus local level. The federal government appropriated the funds, but local representatives administrated them. Tulsa officials decided the training facilities would only be open to black men and registration with the United States Employment Service office in Tulsa would be required. In an article titled “Washington Promises NAACP Appropriation for National Defense Shop in Next Few Days,” the *Eagle* reported black men would also have to produce a birth certificate in order to complete the registration. African Americans without a birth certificate in 1940s Tulsa would have encountered difficulties in obtaining one. Oklahoma had only gained statehood in 1907, which means that individuals forty-six and older would have been born before there existed a state agency to issue such documents. This problem is magnified for African Americans as they, pre-statehood and after, were more likely to be born at home or in segregated facilities. Both situations increased the

¹⁵¹ “Washington Promises NAACP Appropriation For National Defense Shop in Next Few Days,” *The Oklahoma Eagle*, January 24, 1942, 1 and “Tulsa Fights Defense Discrimination,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, January 31, 1942, 4.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

chances that “official” birth registration been neglected. Black families in Tulsa who had given birth in the segregated hospital and had their child’s birth properly registered still had to deal with the aftermath of the 1921 Massacre as the black hospital, and any records it contained, burned.¹⁵³

Three weeks later, the paper ran an article explaining how to secure birth certificates. This article’s front-page placement indicates that birth certificate requirements continued to be onerous. The paper gave two sets of instructions, noting the process remained simple for those whose birth had been registered within the state. Individuals in this situation need only “send in their name, father’s name, mother’s maiden name, date of birth and fifty cents.” Supposing that the individual had the facts at hand, fifty cents would have been quite a large fee to expect an unemployed person at the end of the Depression to produce.¹⁵⁴

When describing those not fortunate enough to have a registered birth, which according to the article, attending physicians at black hospitals often failed to record, the *Eagle* predicted greater difficulty in securing documentation. The paper closed the article by saying that “there [were] a large number of [blacks] in this ...group because of the circumstances under which they made their arrival.” The author noted that the case was “not hopeless, even for these.” Here, though, the *Eagle* had no advice to give, only hope. The inability of the paper to offer its readers a step-by-step process by which they could prove their citizenship, underscores how

¹⁵³ “Washington Promises NAACP Appropriation For National Defense Shop in Next Few Days,” *Oklahoma Eagle*, January 24, 1942; “Oklahomans Born Before 1907 Find it Hard to Get Birth Certificates,” *The Oklahoma Eagle*, February 14, 1942 and Eddie Faye Gates, *They Came Searching: How Blacks Sought the Promised Land in Tulsa* (Fort Worth: Eakin Press, 1997), 46.

¹⁵⁴ “Oklahomans Born Before 1907 Find it Hard to Get Birth Certificates,” *The Oklahoma Eagle*, February 14, 1942, 1 and Gates, *They Came Searching*, 46.

just how effective a barrier a document requirement could be at preventing African Americans from even training for skilled jobs.¹⁵⁵

The birth certificate requirement excluded large numbers of African Americans from skilled defense work. It delayed training for more. According to *The Oklahoma Eagle*, it was more common in 1943, for blacks rather than whites to not have either a birth certificate or to have had their birth officially registered. Evidence suggests that some whites did not have to leap this burdensome hurdle. According to an interview of white former employees of the Tulsa Douglas facility during World War II. The employees revealed that birth certificate requirements were not actually required of whites to begin training. A white defense worker had undergone processing at the National Guard Armory and had been concerned that they would not be allowed to train because they did not have a birth certificate. Upon the prospective trainee's arrival at the Armory, he/she noticed several individuals in the waiting room also did not have birth certificates. When questioned by the registration worker about his/her birth certificate the applicant replied: "You can go ahead and put me to work. Just like you did them [individuals without birth certificates]."¹⁵⁶

In addition to having the birth certificate requirement waived, the applicant completed no training courses. Instead, he/she went directly to Douglas the same day the application was filed never having produced a birth certificate. When pressed as to how many women worked at Douglas, the subject responded that there were more women than men and that they did

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ T. Spencer Wise, "Gladys Carlton, Keith Harris, Arthur Warner Interview," *National History Day Project: Airbase 3 Interviews: Impact of the Tulsa/Douglas Bomber Plant: Worker and Witness Interviews*, 1997, Douglas Aircraft, Vertical Files, Tulsa Historical Society. This source is a transcript from a recorded group interview. Unfortunately, the format does not make it possible to attribute specific quotes to specific individuals.

not know what they were doing because many “never did take the training.” Such was the environment in defense industry training courses in 1940s Tulsa; blacks were required to produce documentation they did not have, and black women were not allowed to train at all. White men and women, however, could walk into skilled, well-paying, union jobs with no training.¹⁵⁷

By November 1942, *the Oklahoma Eagle* weekly applied as much public pressure as possible to force the recalcitrant personnel managers to train and hire blacks for skilled positions. In a front-page story titled “Skilled Labor Taboo at Douglas Bomber Plant,” the paper updated the public. A reporter, without first identifying himself as such, contacted Mr. McGinnis, a personnel manager at Douglas, to ask if the company still needed skilled workers. McGinnis reported Douglas was desperate for skilled labor and would put anyone to work “as fast as they qualified.” The reporter, then identified himself as working for the *Eagle* asked why, if Douglas had a labor shortage, did the company refuse to hire black workers “as soon as they qualified?” McGinnis said he could do nothing as black applicants who trained at Berry’s Garage had completed the wrong type of training to be employed at Douglas.¹⁵⁸

The *Oklahoma Eagle* smelled a rat. Noting that large numbers of blacks were leaving Tulsa for skilled jobs on the West Coast, the reporter asked Mr. McGinnis how training received in Tulsa could be good enough for a skilled job at Douglas’ Santa Monica facility but not its Tulsa one? McGinnis would only say that the situation, unfortunate as it was, had nothing to do with Tulsa Douglas. He left out, however, that Douglas could easily resolve the issue as the company

¹⁵⁷ “Oklahomans Born Before 1907 Find it Hard to Get Birth Certificates,” *The Oklahoma Eagle*, February 14, 1942, 1 and Gates, *They Came Searching*, 46.

¹⁵⁸ ‘Skilled Labor Taboo At Douglas Bomber Plant,’ *The Oklahoma Eagle*, November 21, 1942, 2.

operated its own segregated training facilities on site. Presumably, had blacks been allowed to train there, they would have been perfect candidates for employment at Douglas.¹⁵⁹ The paper argued that given the mounting evidence, it had become clear the Douglas plant was not interested in skilled black labor. At the end of November 1942, the *Oklahoma Eagle* began a very public, very loud, negative publicity campaign against Douglas aircraft. Where behind the scenes negotiations and FEPC intervention failed, the *Eagle* succeeded with its frontpage militancy.

Employment at Douglas

Led by the NAACP branch and *the Oklahoma Eagle*, continual pressure from black Tulsans and the FEPC finally began to wear down Douglas in November of that year. In a weekly report, Lewis Clymer, FEPC Regional Examiner, described a recent meeting with Mr. F. H. Carson, a personnel manager at the facility. Douglas currently employed 14 African Americans in skilled and semi-skilled capacities and Carson claimed the integration was “working out exceptionally well.” He also claimed there were a total of 160 blacks employed. Presumably, all but the 14 in skilled or semi-skilled positions worked as custodians or general labor.¹⁶⁰

The pressure also convinced Douglas officials to create a plan to increase African American employment, especially as it related to black women and skilled work. Douglas argued it had to balance local sensibilities, potential production delays, and the requirements of the FEPC when deciding how to integrate more skilled black workers. The plan, as proposed by Douglas, was guaranteed to be rejected by blacks and *the Oklahoma Eagle*, with good reason.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, “War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports,” November 4, 1942; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

The company proposed hiring all future black workers as unskilled janitors for a probationary period so that they could “become known to the employees” and department heads could have “time to observe their attitudes.” After enough time passed the company would determine which employees would “be thoughtful enough to avoid incidents that might occur after they [had] been upgraded.” Those select individuals would be promoted to a skilled position. Carson promised to hire even more skilled workers “after the newness of the program” had worn off. So, if skilled black workers were willing to hire in as janitors until they could convince management they would not cause any “problems,” they might be rewarded with a skilled position in the future.¹⁶¹

As expected, black Tulsans did not find the plan acceptable, and they called on Clymer to hold a conference in Tulsa to find a workable solution. The delegation included race leaders Amos T. Hall, J. T. A. West and E. L. Goodwin. For the first time, Douglas personnel managers were accompanied by Harry O. Williams, the general manager of the Tulsa facility. The presence of Williams alone demonstrates how seriously Douglas regarded the situation. In the meeting he announced Douglas planned to hire 1,000 African Americans to work in skilled positions as soon as the plant could properly accommodate them. He, like so many Douglas representatives before him, claimed Douglas wanted to hire large numbers of blacks at its Tulsa facility, but that their geographic location made this goal difficult to meet. Williams thought everything would work out “to the satisfaction of both races” once segregated drinking fountains, cafeterias, and toilets were constructed.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, “War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports,” November 19, 1942; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

¹⁶² “Skilled Negro Labor Taboo At Douglas Bomber Plant,” *The Oklahoma Eagle*, November 21, 1942, 2.

At the end of the conference, Douglas officials suggested Goodwin use his newspaper to ask local African Americans to prepare themselves for jobs by enrolling in and completing the appropriate training programs. In exchange for complying with the FEPC, Douglas wanted to dictate what *the Oklahoma Eagle* did or did not publish, again. Management wanted Goodwin to not publish anything in his paper about the company's plans to hire 1,000 blacks, lest it create unnecessary racial tension in Tulsa. Goodwin agreed and promoted defense training. Interested parties were urged to enroll at the training school, located in the Berry's garage, and to equip themselves with the courses offered. For months, Goodwin kept his word until it became apparent Douglas had asked for silence, because they hoped to hire as few African Americans as possible and thus dodge any potential incidents arising from integration from white or black communities.¹⁶³

A week later, Lewis Clymer reported to his boss in Washington that an unusual situation had developed. He explained the campaign of pressure from black leaders in Tulsa had prompted Douglas to ask for assistance. F. H. Carson, personnel manager, complained that "adverse publicity had been launched by a [black] newspaper." Douglas did not request help in integrating black trainees and skilled employees, rather, they asked the FEPC to stop the *Eagle* from printing further negative items. In return, Carson vowed Douglas would immediately increase numbers of black trainees and skilled workers. Clymer reached out to Amos T. Hall who "agreed to see to it that no other articles of this nature would be published," so long as Douglas rapidly progressed toward integration. Douglas did not continue to make progress

¹⁶³ "Negroes Employed at Douglas Dissatisfied With Company's Discrimination," *The Oklahoma Eagle*, March 6, 1942.

toward integration. Now, however, the facility placed the blame on local black leaders, claiming that racial tensions in the city were too high to even consider further integration.¹⁶⁴

Unbowed, Amos T. Hall gave a fiery speech at an NAACP community meeting on March 3, 1943. He exhorted the crowd to “fight for the right to make [their] contribution” to the war effort and “for elimination of ... discrimination.” He called foul on Douglas’ most recent excuse that whites would not accept working with blacks. Denouncing the claim as not based in fact, Hall reminded his audience that initial efforts to integrate Douglas had been successful. “Not a single white man or woman quit work when these trained [African Americans] were employed. Not a bit of friction” occurred. He argued this “worry-free” experiment in integration proved that blacks should be immediately integrated into all skilled positions at Douglas.¹⁶⁵ The speech ended with a vow that Hall and North Tulsa would not cease until the situation was remedied. Hall promised he would once again journey to Washington, D.C. if it meant skilled jobs for blacks at Douglas.¹⁶⁶ The company claimed separate facilities did not constitute normal practice. They had never confronted these issues until opening facilities in states where segregation was codified. Hall, on behalf of the NAACP, agreed to accept Douglas’ offer to create separate toilets and drinking fountains if the accommodations were equitable¹⁶⁷

The same week Amos T. Hall spoke at the community meeting, E. L. Goodwin’s *Oklahoma Eagle* let rip. No longer would they ignore conditions at Douglas Aircraft or be silent

¹⁶⁴ Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, “War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports,” November 25, 1942; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

¹⁶⁵ “Amos Hall Bared Facts In Effort To Secure Employment for Negroes In Local War Plants,” *The Oklahoma Eagle*, March 6, 1943, 1.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁶⁷ “Negroes Employed At Douglas Dissatisfied With Company’s Dis[crimination],” *The Oklahoma Eagle*, March 6, 1943, 1.

about the company's false promises. In the front-page article "Negroes Employed at Douglas Dissatisfied with Company's discrimination" the paper detailed the heretofore secret meeting with company officials and Lewis Clymer in November of the previous year. Goodwin also revealed Douglas' promise to hire skilled African Americans in large numbers if the paper kept it quiet.¹⁶⁸ The *Eagle* lay all blame at the feet of Douglas arguing the company did not want to employ African Americans but had, up to now, successfully blamed the situation on training issues. The *Eagle* again stressed the facts did not support this argument. "Several hundred [African Americans] entered the training school and the biggest majority [had] left Tulsa for other states to execute what they were taught because Douglas absolutely refused to employ them in any other than a janitorial capacity." Skilled positions had simply not been offered to African Americans and training, or lack thereof, was not solely to blame. As the *Eagle* noted, "Hundreds of trainees, who have established homes and families in Tulsa are forced to seek employment in other cities and leave their families and homes because of the prejudices carried on by the Tulsa Douglass [sic] plant."¹⁶⁹

Furthermore, the paper reported, blacks employed at the plant were afraid to speak openly about how bad conditions were for fear of losing their jobs. They were told not to give out any information about anything inside the facility or they would be accused of sabotage and fired. The workers were "earnest in their conviction about not revealing any information that would be of harm to Douglass", and yet, they wanted "an equal opportunity to work," said an employee who requested to remain anonymous. Other confidential sources claimed white

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

supervisors conspired to prevent black promotions. Workers completed training only to be “employed as janitors” and then trapped in the position and department indefinitely because the supervisor would “advise other department heads” the black janitor could not be spared or transferred, or the accused of being troublemakers.¹⁷⁰

Another black worker said he was sent to Tulsa by a out-of-state federal agency to work as a supervisor at Douglas. He arrived at the personnel department and showed his credentials, but when the officials discovered that he was African American, they told him the position had been filled. Douglas protested that personnel managers knew he had traveled from another state and because they felt bad about this, Douglas found a position for him as a motor washer. The *Eagle* noted “the worker [had] been washing motors for more than three months, and as yet had not had the opportunity to aid in speeding production of much needed airplanes.”¹⁷¹

Instances of skilled black workers being demoted, fired, or refused employment at first sight were common FEPC complaints in Oklahoma. Willie Roscoe Carter, a black World War I veteran, wrote to the FEPC in December of 1942 to inform the committee of his case. He had completed war plant training and passed “with a high mark.” His scores got him called to Douglas Aircraft to speak with the personnel department. Upon arrival he could not help but notice he was the only person of color in a room full of what he estimated to be around 200 white applicants. The day stretched from 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., at which time Mr. Carter was told to return the next day. Again, he spent most of the day in the waiting room. The personnel officers ignored him until all white men and women were called and placed. Finally, they called

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

Mr. Carter up to inform him there were no more jobs available. Carter knew the situation revolved around race. He had seen the same situation often in “cases which happen in [Oklahoma].” He closed by offering to report all such cases he encountered to the FEPC in the future.¹⁷²

Washington Adams had the same type of complaint. He brought it to the attention of President Roosevelt. He felt it crucial that the president “should know about the things that happen[ed] in these defense” jobs. Cognizant of requirements in Tulsa, Adams’ included a copy of his birth certificate and his certification for sheet metal work as proof of his qualifications and readiness. His personal reason for writing involved Douglas Aircraft in Tulsa. He was notified by the company to report for job placement. The first question the interviewer asked was “do you have any ‘[black] blood’ in you. Mr. Adams replied that he did not, even though he had mixed parentage. At this point his letter stresses to the President that he had “loyal [black] blood.” The interviewer then offered Adams a job he viewed appropriate for blacks. One that required Adams to work “out in the cold turning the propellers on airplanes.” In response to the offensive idea of racially stratified work, Washington Adams pointed out that when the United States collects junk to build bombs to drop on the Japanese, no one ask if it was made using “[black]” scrap. The FEPC closed the case for insufficient information after Adams did not supply the name and title of his interviewer. This complaint is a reminder of how the design of the FEPC limited its ability to act. It could not investigate without detailed information and had no

¹⁷² Willie Roscoe Carter to Fair Employment Committee, December 8, 1942; Cases Closed: C-Insufficient Information, Box 8 of 15; Region IX, Non-Docketable Cases, 1943-1946; RG 228.

mandate, or system, to collate multiple examples of similar complaints occurring at the same facilities.¹⁷³

In the March 6, 1943, editorial titled “WAKE UP, DOUGLAS,” *the Oklahoma Eagle* called out the injustices committed by Douglas management. The editor, Horace H. Hughes, reminded his readers of Tulsa’s complicated racial past and how it continued, twenty-two years after the massacre, to influence the policy of integration. “Unfortunately, the place was located in a place that was so imbued with racial prejudice that [it] would prohibit a group of loyal Americans from working on the assembly lines.” He linked the potential failure of the war effort with a lack of integration by Douglas and pointed out that “white soldiers in Africa are not taking time out to inquire as to whether the ships were built by Nordic hands or black hands; they ask no questions, they simply want to know if the machine is well assembled.” Hughes finished the editorial with a warning to Douglas that the paper would again contact officials in Washington and file new complaints if needed.¹⁷⁴

Based on the March 13, 1943, edition of the *Eagle*, it seems Douglas ignored the paper’s threats and continuing efforts by the Tulsa NAACP. The lead story revealed that “Discrimination at Douglas Forced Negro Defense Workers to Leave State.” Evidence that Douglas did not come anywhere close to hiring the number of African Americans it had promised. The sub-headlines continued the barrage against Douglas: “Trainees Denied Recognition at Plant Except as Flunkies” and “Employees at Plant Say Conditions Worse than in Private Industry.” Hughes cited

¹⁷³ Washington Adams to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, December 29, 1942; Cases Closed – Douglas Aircraft Corp, Oklahoma City, OK, Box 10 of 15; Closed Cases, 1943-1945; RG 228 and George M. Johnson, Assistant Executive Secretary FEPC to Washington Adams, January 23, 1943; Cases Closed – Douglas Aircraft Corp, Oklahoma City, OK, Box 10 of 15; Closed Cases, 1943-1945; RG 228.

¹⁷⁴ Horace S. Hughes, “The Editor Speaks: WAKE UP, DOUGLAS.” *The Oklahoma Eagle*, March 6, 1943.

a Tulsa Board of Education report showing that since the establishment of defense industry factories in the Tulsa area, the African American school population had dropped while the white school population had increased. The article paired the Board of Education report with a recent drop in the number of African Americans who received War Ration Books as further evidence that “an exodus” of young black workers was underway due to the lack of employment opportunities at the Douglas plant. The paper ran several articles throughout 1942 and 1943 that supported the claim that men and women were consistently unable to secure employment at Douglas after the completion of training and were, resultantly, forced to leave the state to find employment.¹⁷⁵

Hughes continued his indictment of Douglas. Saying, “in spite of official denials that there is not discrimination at Douglas, rumors continue to fly thick and fast concerning conditions under which [blacks] at Douglas are employed and under which they work.” He pointed out the hypocrisy of white Tulsans asking black citizens to help subsidize construction of the Douglas plant and then prohibiting them from holding skilled positions at the finished facility. The strategy of reminding blacks that they were trusted with building an aircraft plant but not aircrafts proved an effective way to strike a chord with readers of the *Eagle*. Hughes proclaimed that even though blacks had completed training programs, an African American had “about as much chance of breaking down the color bar at Douglas as a one-legged man has of winning a foot race.” He pointed out that Douglas refused to hire more black workers, even though it was well-known that the plant had never reached its production goals. Hughes affirmed that all African Americans from Tulsa were patriotic, but there was no need for “us to

¹⁷⁵ *The Oklahoma Eagle*, March 13, 1943.

lie about being happy and satisfied when our people receive the same sort of treatment that they would receive in an Axis world.”¹⁷⁶

Under the headline of “Hi-jacking Defense Workers,” the editorial page contained another indictment against Douglas and its abuses of black workers. This brief news item related that an aircraft industry newsletter, *Airline Bulletin*, had published a recent letter to the editor. Written by a black janitor in Tulsa, it detailed the existence of a loan scheme at Douglas involving a supervisor who lent money to African Americans for 25% interest. Even more unbelievable is that Douglas was complicit with this practice to the point of enacting wage garnishments “for usurious interest” to be paid to the supervisor.¹⁷⁷

Under the direction of E.L. Goodwin and Horace Hughes, the *Eagle*’s constant barrage of negative stories about Douglas hit their mark. Behind the scenes, the company scrambled to control the situation. Lewis Clymer reported increasing tension between black Tulsans and the *Eagle*. Officials at Douglas Aircraft Company were “disturbed over the attitude of the Negro community and recent newspaper articles appearing in the Negro press charging the company with discriminatory hiring practices Relative to trainees.” Reports of “large numbers of trainees” leaving for work in other states particularly concerned the facility. Regardless of complaints, Douglas broke. They closed their conversation by asking Clymer to come to the Tulsa facility to help them “institute pay training for [black] trainees” and to hire a counselor dedicated to recruiting, training, and hiring African Americans.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Horace S. Hughes, “The Editor Speaks,” *The Oklahoma Eagle*, March 13, 1943, 8.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, “War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports,” March 13, 1943; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

The following week, March 20, 1943, Clymer updated FEPC leaders about improving conditions between black Tulsans and Douglas Aircraft. Black leaders were told Douglas had approved paid training for black workers and that the program would begin the next week. True to form. The company did not fulfil its promises. Some changes did happen, but they were very limited and quickly judged unacceptable by black Tulsans. Douglas now paid twenty black trainees; they paid 1000 white ones. Clymer push Douglass to divide paid trainee positions equally between blacks and whites. Unless the Douglas Aircraft Company places more persons in training than the twenty mentioned, Clymer planned to involve a representative from the United States Air Corps to further pressure the facility.¹⁷⁹

By April 3, 1943, the company still resisted training more blacks on a paid basis. The tension in the city between blacks and whites was dangerously high. Clymer reported the “program of exclusion of Negro workers [caused] much concern among the Negro populace” as they knew they had “not shared to any great extent in the employment opportunities afforded by war industries in that area. Clymer called another meeting with Douglas management, black community leaders, members of an interracial commission, and the War Manpower Commission Area Director. He planned to keep everyone together until the paid training situation for black workers could be resolved.¹⁸⁰ Clymer reported the following week that the meeting had been successful and felt confident the paid training situation for African Americans would no longer be an issue.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, “War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports,” March 20, 1943; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

¹⁸⁰ Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, “War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports,” April 3, 1943; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

¹⁸¹ Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, “War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports,” April 10, 1943; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211

On April 17, 1943, Hughes' editorial sounded conciliatory. He wrote about the April 3rd meeting of racially diverse individuals who had assembled to discuss employment problems at Tulsa. He spoke hopefully of the newly expanded interracial commission tasked with resolving issues.

"The creation of this commission is a step forward in the solution of [a] real problem which can no longer be ignored by white leadership. The very fact that the Negro represents one tenth of the population of Tulsa makes him far more important as a group than any other minority and the wide-spread intense prejudice against him makes him a focal point both in defense and in progress. His problems demand solution and his abilities should be used here in Tulsa as elsewhere throughout the nation. The issue was clear cut - whether Tulsa Negroes are being given opportunities for full participation in the war effort in fields in which they are capable of serving."¹⁸²

Douglas, however, still failed to increase paid training courses for African Americans.

Clymer made good on his threat and contacted the Air Force procurement representative and asked them to intervene with Douglas.¹⁸³ That did the trick. In the face of criticism from the Air Force, Douglas finally started working in good faith. By July of 1943, Douglass paid black trainees \$31.00 per week. The company now employed over 800 African Americans, 150 of those were women. Black men were being upgraded to skilled positions as well and there were now two paid training classes for black Tulsans.¹⁸⁴ Black Tulsans, by utilizing the FEPC, had triumphed in its quest to secure skilled training for black workers, the first step toward skilled

¹⁸² Horace S. Hughes, "The Editor Speaks: A Common Ground," *The Oklahoma Eagle*, Saturday, April 17, 1943.

¹⁸³ Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, "War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports," April 17, 1943; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

¹⁸⁴ Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, "War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports," April 24, 1943; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211; Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, "War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports," May 8, 1943; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211 and Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, "War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports," July 24, 1943; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

employment at Douglas Aircraft. Furthermore, by July 24, 1943, Douglas Aircraft employed 815 African Americans as skilled production workers fifty of whom were women.¹⁸⁵

In November of 1944, Roy Hoglund, Region IX Field Representative, came to Tulsa to ensure progress had continued. He met with Booker T. Washington High School Principal Woods, J. T. A. West, E. L. Goodwin, and Horace Hughes. These men all survived the 1921 Massacre and led defense integration efforts in Tulsa. The men all agreed that when Douglas finally complied with FEPC rules and placed blacks in paid training programs and skilled positions, racial tension in the city had decreased from its critical level the previous year. His tour of Douglas Aircraft confirmed the reports. The facility had just signed a new production contract and planned to increase the number of black trainees and employees for the foreseeable future. Mr. Oglvie, a personnel manager, said anyone who could pass the physical examination “would be fitted into any type of job which his background and experience would qualify him for irrespective of race, creed, or color.” Hoglund spoke with African Americans working in various capacities on the production lines. The black workers were, however, still segregated into specific departments and held a disproportionate number of janitorial positions. Oglvie assured Hoglund things were running well. “The work of the [black workers] had been entirely satisfactory.”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Lewis Clymer, Minorities Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, “Report for Negro Employment at Various Firms,” July 24, 1943; Folder 533.142 – 533.15, Box 30, Regional Central Files, 1942-1945; RG 211.

¹⁸⁶ Roy A. Hoglund, Regional FEPC Director, Region IX, Kansas City, MO, “FEPC Weekly Report,” November 18, 1944; Weekly Reports, Box 11 of 15, Closed Cases, 1943-1945; RG 228.

Spartan Aircraft Company

Privately held Spartan Aircraft Company, in sharp contrast to Douglas Aircraft and DuPont Ordinance Works, did not comply with FEPC policies for the duration of the war. The combination of black press and community activism could not the company even with federal intervention. The Spartan complaints offer an extreme demonstration of the challenges face by the FEPC as it sought to enforce employment policy without having powers of enforcement.

On July 17, 1928, W. H. Skelly incorporated Spartan Aircraft company. The company specialized in the C3-120 and the Spartan Zeus, the latter became a favorite for military training. In addition to aircraft production, Spartan also operated a flight school, Spartan School of Aeronautics in 1928. By World War II, the company was owned and operated by J. Paul Getty. During World War II the company overhauled engines, build planes and trained thousands of army pilots at airfields across Oklahoma.¹⁸⁷

Spartan Aircraft Company did not willingly comply with FEPC polices. In fact, they were the most resistant to integration in Oklahoma among defense contractors. The company had a long history in Tulsa as a producer of aircraft and a trainer of pilots; two commodities the United States needed desperately. Spartan relied on the company's importance to the war to thwart integration efforts. They bet wartime necessity would shield them from the FEPC's only enforcement power of pulling government contracts. Spartan president J.P. Getty also used his influence and the fact that the company was privately held to further resist integration efforts. By employing these arguments as dilatory tactics, Spartan remained a lily-white employer until

¹⁸⁷ Oklahoma Skywriter, "Special Report: Saga of Tulsa Aviation Covers Sixty-Five Years," April 26, 1968.

late 1943. It took the combined efforts of the FEPC and the local and national offices of the NAACP to make the slightest dent.

The delays started early. In August of 1941, Walter White, Secretary of the NAACP, wrote to the president of the Tulsa branch, Attorney Amos T. Hall. He reported Lawrence Cramer, executive secretary of the FEPC, had received confirmation from Spartan that the company planned to employ African Americans. White asked if the Tulsa branch had a plan in place to direct “trained [blacks] to the Spartan Company.”¹⁸⁸ This letter revealed important points. First the highest levels of the FEPC working with defense contractors toward integration and were in direct communication with the national offices of the NAACP within three months of the agency’s creation. Additionally, the secretary assumed that African Americans were receiving defense industry training in Tulsa. They were not. White’s query, then, serves as a reminder that information at the national level did not necessarily correspond to conditions on the local level. His confusion likely also stemmed from the fact that the Oklahoma State Conference of Branches called their own shots when it came activism. Hall had been in contact with Spartan for some time. He explained the situation on the ground in Tulsa to White. While it was true that Spartan’s Chairman of the Board explicitly stated he did not have an “objection to hiring Negroes if they are qualified.” He had yet to endorse integration much less plan for its implementation. Obfuscation became Spartan’s watchword. The company repeatedly promised

¹⁸⁸ John H. Bracey, Jr. and August Meier, eds., *Papers of the NAACP: Part 13: NAACP and Labor*, Walter White, Executive Secretary for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to Amos T. Hall, President, Tulsa NAACP, August 26, 1941, reproduced from *Papers of the NAACP: Part 13: NAACP and Labor*, Reel 13: Slide 119.

national officials and FEPC representatives they would act while simultaneously preventing any progress toward integration and ignoring local black leaders.¹⁸⁹

Attorney Hall first contacted Spartan in early 1941 for assurances they would hire African American workers. White officials in Tulsa were refusing to allocate federal training funds to prepare African Americans for defense work. City, County, and State officials argued that defense facilities in Oklahoma would never agree to employ black workers. As such, investing in training courses for blacks would be a waste of resources that could be used to train more whites. Unless Hall could get Spartan and Douglas Aircraft to guarantee they would hire skilled black workers in Tulsa, training funds would not be allocated. Neither company, no matter what Spartan's chairman of the board told the FEPC, had confirmed to Hall they would hire black workers.¹⁹⁰ After continued silence, Hall filed an official complaint with the newly operational FEPC. On November 28, 1941, the Press Service of the NAACP announced a successful resolution. African Americans "are being trained to do all types of [aircraft] work." Yet again, however, the national office had been duped. Training rumors were just that. Tulsa officials continued to stall the process of setting up training facilities for African Americans, and the refusal of Spartan to commit to employ black workers enabled them to do so.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ John H. Bracey, Jr. and August Meier, eds., *Papers of the NAACP: Part 13: NAACP and Labor*, Amos T. Hall, President, Oklahoma State Conference of Branches, Northeast, to Walter White, Executive Secretary for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, August 20, 1941, reproduced from *Papers of the NAACP: Part 13: NAACP and Labor*, Reel 13: Slide 120.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ John H. Bracey, Jr. and August Meier, eds., *Papers of the NAACP: Part 13: NAACP and Labor*, Press Service of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, "19 Negro Carpenters Get Work on Tulsa Bomber Plant After Long Fight," November 28, 1941, reproduced from *Papers of the NAACP: Part 13: NAACP and Labor*, Reel 13: Slide 122.

As of November 1942, a year after Hall filed his official complaint against Spartan Aircraft, the company had still not determined what to do, if anything, with black applicants. Spartan had 1,400 employees at the time and expected to need over 3,000 workers by the end of the war. To counter ongoing labor shortages, the company planned to recruit workers from across Oklahoma and out of state rather than utilize African Americans.¹⁹²

A full year after Spartan first convinced the national NAACP of their belief in integration, the company remained a whites only employer. Investigator Lewis Clymer reported he had arranged a conference with officials at Spartan to “discuss” integration. Attendees included J. P. Getty, president of Spartan, W. H. Woodward, Personnel Director, and Joe W. Wheeler, a representative from the International Association of Machinists (IAM), Tulsa Lodge #790. The IAM pledged support for the war effort early and vowed to not call any strikes during wartime and Wheeler seemed the most comfortable with African American workers. He guaranteed there would “be no objection” by the union. The promise rang hollow considering black workers could not be members of the local at this time. He said, however, that workers would be “represented the same as the union members” until the local constitution could be changed, or segregated unions established.¹⁹³

As great as these statements sounded, they were hard for Clymer to take seriously considering Wheeler and the personnel directors believed African Americans were already prohibited from working at Spartan. Clymer’s report described the company’s position. “The

¹⁹² Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, “War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports,” November 4, 1942; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

¹⁹³ Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, “War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports,” October 29, 1942; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

officials of the Spartan Aircraft Company feel that “since their plant is not government owned or operated, they should not be required to strictly adhere to government policy concerning fair employment practice.”¹⁹⁴ Additionally, company managers argued “prevalent . . . absenteeism” among black workers made them undesirable employees. Clymer advised the attendees the contract the company held with the federal government is why they were obligated to observe FEPC regulations. If they received government money, they had to play by government rules. The meeting ended with a promise from Spartan that their personnel directors, foremen, and supervisors now understood the law and would “discuss” job openings for African Americans immediately.¹⁹⁵

Spartan remained unmoved through early 1943. Clymer continued to meet with company officials. By March, his persistence finally elicited another promise from Spartan. Personnel directors said the company had decided to employ African Americans, some in skilled positions. In furtherance of this, fifteen black trainees were slated to begin by the end of April, and they were to be only the first of many waves of black hires. Yet, Spartan remained true to form, by May black employees had still not been hired. Prospective white employees, however, began receiving paid training the same month.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, “War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports,” November 19, 1942; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, “War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports,” February 4, 1943; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211; Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, “War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports,” March 13, 1943; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211; Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, “War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports,” March 20, 1943; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211 and Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, “War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports,” May 8, 1943; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

At this point, Lewis Clymer required representatives of Spartan to meet with him in Kansas City. The Spartan representative – when pressed as to the companies repeated broken promises and obvious stalling tactics – now claimed the company wanted to integrate its workforce but lacked the facilities to do so. This was common excuse for defense industries in Oklahoma. What the Spartan representative meant by “lacking facilities” is that they currently did not have segregated training courses, workspaces, cafeterias, bathrooms, or drinking fountains. Any one of these missing spaces could be used to explain why a given company could not possibly integrate even though they were “fully” committed to the principles of the FEPC. After guaranteeing that the War Production Board would assist in securing materials and facilities, Clymer requested Spartan train some African Americans in its next round of training classes as a show of progress to local African American leaders and the FEPC. He informed the personnel directors they could start immediately as the Tulsa branch of the NAACP had secured the use of black school buildings for black training courses. This meant Spartan did not have to wait for the construction of segregated training buildings before training skilled black workers.¹⁹⁷

In October 1943, Clymer and the FEPC asked the Commanding General of the Army Air Force Procurement Division to intervene as Spartan still had no black trainees or employees. The general asked Spartan to “give serious consideration” to employing African Americans for its “production operation.” Faced with someone who could hurt their bottom line, Spartan, at last, relented. In his November 13, 1943 report, Clymer noted four black men had been hired by

¹⁹⁷ Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, “War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports,” May 15, 1943; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

Spartan as maintenance workers. In July of 1944, the Spartan had only doubled the number of maintenance workers to eight. Spartan, led by J. P. Getty, almost completely avoided hiring African Americans.¹⁹⁸ The effort of integrate Spartan Aircraft Company is representative of what African Americans were up against in Oklahoma. They faced companies the country could not do without and, as a result, an FEPC with no real enforcement power. The only tools left in the box were pressure and persistence at the federal and local levels, and the efforts were not always successful.¹⁹⁹

By June of 1945, the defense industry boom in Tulsa was greatly diminished as the war effort wound down. In May of 1945 alone, the area had lost 7,360 with more scheduled for at least the next four months. Production had been cut at Spartan, Douglas, and DuPont Ordinance Works. Douglas had already lost 7,360 workers with another 5,600 scheduled to go in the immediate future. In Chouteau, DuPont planned to cut production by 50% and the total workforce by at least 2000 the next month, July 1945.²⁰⁰

The history of Tulsa and the FEPC demonstrates how the agency looked when successful. In cooperation with the NAACP and *the Oklahoma Eagle*, representatives of the FEPC made extraordinary inroads to defense industry integration. The United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners had been brought under control and new black unions black unions

¹⁹⁸ Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, "War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports, October 11, 1943; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211. and Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX "War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports," November 13, 1943; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

¹⁹⁹ Dave Vandiver, State Manpower Director, Oklahoma to Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, July 3, 1944; Folder 533.142 – 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

²⁰⁰ "Filed Operations Report," June 1945; Folder 317.22/03 – 317.32/04, Box 9, Regional Central Files, 1942-1945; RG 211.

established. African Americans now received paid training courses and worked in skilled positions and administrative ones like black employment counselors at Douglas and DuPont. With these new positions, hundreds of African Americans benefited from large wage increases. Those funds went into black businesses, war bonds, and NAACP funding raising efforts to secure rights and opportunities beyond what the FEPC delivered.

The FEPC in Oklahoma City

In August 1940, almost a year before the creation of the FEPC and sixteen months before Pearl Harbor, Roscoe Dunjee, the unrivaled leader of Oklahoma City's black community, arranged a conference at Langston University, the state's only black college located on the northern edge of the Oklahoma City region, to formulate strategies for securing defense industry job training for African Americans. Thus far, the state of Oklahoma through its public school vocational programs only offered job training for the defense industries to white or Native American workers. To justify the exclusion of African Americans, the state relied on a myriad of excuses and the assistance of local union leaders committed to locking black Oklahomans out of skilled war work. Dunjee had called black teachers, professors, and administrators from across the state to meet with state and federal government representatives. He hoped to reveal the malign efforts of the state to prevent black job training for the defense industry and convince the federal representative to intervene on behalf of black Oklahomans. Since statehood, Dunjee and other race leaders had repeatedly found success by calling on the federal government to intervene on behalf of African Americans facing Jim Crow discrimination and disenfranchisement. Dunjee, as the most prominent African American leader in Oklahoma City, planned the conference to secure defense industry training for Oklahoma City blacks one and for all.²⁰¹

During opening remarks, L. K. Covelle, a white official, spoke on behalf of the federal government about the importance of defense industries in Oklahoma. He stressed the need for workers in aircraft construction and maintenance repair, ordinance factories, and other

²⁰¹ "America's Defense Program," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, August 10, 1940.

positions. He highlighted with particular concern the practice of trained welders from Oklahoma leaving for the West Coast for immediate work instead of waiting until the planned defense facilities in Oklahoma became operational.²⁰²

Dunjee spoke next and opened by telling Covelle about the situation in Oklahoma City. He said not to worry about African American welders leaving Oklahoma for the West Coast as there had, to date, been zero African Americans trained as welders in the state. He blamed labor unions and state officials. According to Dunjee, labor unions were America's worst enemy during the war as they put their members and their salaries as skilled workers above the war effort by blocking African Americans from membership, training, and war work. The editor warned American democracy teetered on a knife's edge and was in danger of bogging down "in a moment of crisis simply because someone may think the Negro might later live-in comfort as a result of knowledge absorbed by defending his country." If the national defense effort were to succeed, national officials had to ensure those administering programs at the state and local levels – labor unions included – stopped "being hypocritical about it" and to accept the prospect of well-to-do, patriotic, African Americans.²⁰³

Following remarks, the meeting transitioned to an open discussion. Covelle, no doubt aware all eyes were fixed on him, explained the difficulty as he saw it. Speaking of black schools, he asked "what are we going to do about what you are talking about when we go around to the high school principal and college president who tells us they [black students] are interested only in courses which develop youth for white collar jobs?" Covelle explained that

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

state officials had told him that black defense training could not happen because black educators did not want any type of training related to manual labor. Instead, his sources claimed black educators only cared about DuBois' "Talented Tenth." This insidious ploy was one of the favorites of white Oklahomans when denying assistance to blacks. In short, state government officials portrayed themselves as wanting to help the war effort and blacks both, but, they claimed, blacks did not want to help themselves by working in jobs appropriate to their "social standing."²⁰⁴

Dunjee responded by pulling "the hide off the educational program in Oklahoma [to] look at it naked and bare." The editor linked the issue of defense courses to broader educational struggles in Oklahoma and argued the state utilized a history of Jim Crow education, poor educational funding, and a willingness to blame African Americans for their inability to find defense work. A white attendee proved this point. When asked by the federal representative what Oklahoma did to prepare black workers to meet the nation's needs, the white official replied that blacks could receive the finest training to be a barber or maid if they so desired. Dr. D. G. Horton, a professor at the all-black Langston University, returned the focus to white officials. He argued the real problem was that whites had not sufficiently funded black education since statehood, and as result, black schools did not have enough equipment or the correct equipment to give defense training. Some schools did not even have a suitable building.

By the meeting's end, Covelle knew Oklahoma City's African Americans were ready and willing to participate in war work, but unions and the state of Oklahoma made it impossible without federal intervention and assistance. Covelle promised to resolve the issue and get

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

skilled black labor into defense production operations in state. His promise marked the first victory for Oklahoma City race leaders in a long fight to secure defense training and skilled war work for black Oklahomans. Dunjee and compatriots left the meeting more certain than ever that efforts to secure defense jobs could only happen by involving the federal government.

The Langston conference demonstrated the determination of black Oklahomans Citizens to secure skilled defense jobs and how they planned to get them. The city's black leaders harkened back to earlier battles won against Jim Crow in Oklahoma. All victories relied on unwavering militancy with the aim of prompting federal intervention. The strategy had served them well. In fact, the only time Black Oklahomans failed to make progress against Jim Crow was during World War I when militancy had been traded for "closing ranks." Race leaders in Oklahoma, like March on Washington Movement (MOWM) founder A. Philip Randolph, were determined to wrench the benefits of World War II employment from the hands of segregationists and racists. This time, they would not "forget our special grievances" for the war's duration. Instead, they wanted guarantees progress would happen now, not at some nebulous future date.²⁰⁵

In Oklahoma City, the combination of a militant NAACP branch, a black newspaper, and the FEPC proved a potent combination in the fight for black war employment that had been denied on the World War I home front. Here Roscoe Dunjee led the drive for defense jobs, published the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch* and served as president of the State Conference of Branches for the Oklahoma NAACP. His position in the community allowed Dunjee to

²⁰⁵ W. E. B. DuBois, "Close Ranks," *The Crisis*, July 1918, 111.

orchestrate the use of the FEPC to secure skilled jobs for blacks. He organized educational campaigns about how to apply for training positions and defense jobs. As a rule, Dunjee assisted anyone who stopped at the offices of the *Dispatch* to file FEPC complaints. After which, the editor, through the State NAACP Conference, would shepherd the complaint through the appropriate FEPC channels and follow-up to ensure a satisfactory result. Should there be any hesitation on the part of officials at the Oklahoma City Air Depot (OCAD) or Douglas Aircraft's Oklahoma City branch to hire African Americans, Dunjee relentlessly publicized the incidents in his newspaper, *The Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*.

Examining the FEPC in Oklahoma City reveals a different approach than that of Tulsa. The *Black Dispatch* reported on FEPC complaints filed against the Oklahoma City Air Depot (OCAD), but with much less vitriol than its Tulsa counterpart. The newspaper reported on ongoing FEPC investigations but did its heaviest lifting during the earliest days of the committee, when it forced the State of Oklahoma to train African Americans for skilled positions. Organizing everything through the NAACP, Dunjee recruited groups of overqualified job applicants to expose the absurdity of Jim Crow hiring practices and encouraged as many people as possible to file FEPC complaints. Dunjee and the NAACP continually pushed for positive action by the committee until cases were closed.

Cases originating in Oklahoma City provide evidence of the successful utilization of the FEPC to extend wartime benefits for African Americans beyond simply being hired or trained. Skilled black laborers used the FEPC to ensure they received appropriate pay raises and promotions. By late 1943, over 800 African Americans had been hired as skilled mechanics at the Oklahoma City Air Depot. This success finding high-waged employment for men led to

efforts to find skilled positions for Black women. Black women aggressively used the FEPC to secure over 65 skilled administrative positions and to push for the integration of all aspects of defense facilities including restrooms, water fountains, and cafeteria spaces. Examining the combined efforts of black applicants, race leaders, and the FEPC in Oklahoma City as they worked together to ensure training, union membership and skilled positions, reveals civil rights and economic progress.

Mobilizing on the Oklahoma City Home Front

In early 1941, before the creation of the FEPC, Black activists, led by Roscoe Dunjee and the *Black Dispatch*, began laying the groundwork to secure African Americans skilled jobs in defense industries proposed for Oklahoma City. African American leaders promised city officials the black community would overwhelmingly support bond elections if African Americans were guaranteed a share of construction and production jobs at the new facilities.

White leaders in Oklahoma City, like those in Tulsa, worked to secure defense facilities for the greater Oklahoma City area. Boosters promoted the region's established petroleum and aviation infrastructure, as well as the centrality of Oklahoma City in the United States. The latter promised relative safety from feared enemy bombing runs on defense facilities. Given the ability of planes at the time, it would have been almost impossible for enemy aircraft to deliver bombs so far inland. The Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, headed by President W. E. Hightower, led the city's efforts. The Chamber created a sub-committee called "the Industries Foundation, Inc." as non-profit trust with the goal of luring defense contractors to Oklahoma City. In addition to Hightower, R. A. Singletary operated in Washington, D.C. on behalf of the foundation. The Industries Foundation, Inc., held donations from Oklahoma Citizens in trust to

hold potential construction sites and pay any expenses that would help win industries. In a brilliant way to guarantee public involvement, the Foundation sold “certificates in the trust” that bore interest and were secured by large guarantees from wealthy backers.²⁰⁶

These efforts helped make the greater Oklahoma City area a military aviation hub. A Naval Aviation facility opened in Norman, 20 miles south of Oklahoma City and the area’s Will Rogers World Airport underwent a massive expansion. There, Douglas Aircraft opened an Oklahoma City facility to construct new planes and the United States Army opened the Oklahoma City Air Depot (OCAD) to repair and overhaul airplane engines. The FEPC experience at Douglas Aircraft in Oklahoma City paralleled that of Tulsa Douglas. Initially, black leaders used the FEPC to break the hold of the local carpenters union of skilled construction jobs. By February 1943, the company hired black workers in skilled and unskilled positions, offered paid training, and hired a black employment counselor. Of the five total FEPC complaints filed two accused Douglas of refusing to hire them based on race. The other three dealt with claims of improper dismissal. All complaints were dismissed based on merits after FEPC investigations. The Oklahoma City location, like Tulsa, refused to provide total employment numbers of black or white workers to the War Manpower Commission. The hiring of black workers and the positions in which they worked was verified, but only by visual assessments of Roy A. Hoglund, the FEPC Region IX director when we visited the facility. In 1944, the War Manpower

²⁰⁶ “Air Depot to Open Jobs for Hundreds of Skilled Civilians,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, February 27, 1941; “Plane Depot Site Choice Due Soon,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, February 28, 1941; “Air Depot, State Men Keep Capital Watch,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, March 7, 1941; “Army to Locate Air Corps Depot Within 10 Days,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, March 10, 1941; “\$75,000 More Needed to Clinch Air Depot Deal,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, March 15, 1941; and “Expansion is Seen for City Air Depot,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, June 5, 1941.

Commission estimated African Americans held only 3% of total positions, a disappointment considering blacks were 9.5% of the population of Oklahoma City.²⁰⁷

The FEPC's failure to gain black workers an equitable percentage of jobs at Douglas is explained by several factors. First, the low employment numbers in comparison to Tulsa Douglas or OCAD demonstrate how much FEPC results could vary depending on locality or facility. Furthermore, OCAD was owned and operated by the Army and therefore much more accustomed to following orders and enforcing policies of the federal government. Douglas Aircraft was a public corporation with a history of having free rein in all employment decisions. The Tulsa Douglas facility was also approved, constructed, and operational almost year earlier than the Oklahoma City facility. Therefore, Oklahoma City race leaders were not as far the FEPC process as Tulsans were.

Because of the close parallels between Douglas Aircraft locations, the chapter focus on OCAD to offer a different viewpoint on the FEPC. Specifically, OCAD, in opposition to Tulsa companies, was operated by the federal government. Military leadership at OCAD, and later in McAlester, were used to taking orders and enforcing federal polices, a situation that matched will with Oklahoma's statist civil rights strategies.

OCAD, the focus of this chapter, cost \$16,000,000 to construct and was headed by Army officers and enlisted men. Over 3,500 jobs were predicted to be open to civilians. Because

²⁰⁷ Gladys Thomas; Douglas Aircraft Co, Inc., Oklahoma City, Box 5 of 15; Closed Cases, 1943-1946; RG 228; Mack Lee Telford; Douglas Aircraft Co, Inc., Oklahoma City, Box 5 of 15; Closed Cases, 1943-1946; RG 228; Ida L. Fullbright; Douglas Aircraft Co, Inc., Oklahoma City, Box 5 of 15; Closed Cases, 1943-1946; RG 228; Percy H. James; Douglas Aircraft Co, Inc., Oklahoma City, Box 5 of 15; Closed Cases, 1943-1946; RG 228; Lillian O. McClland; Douglas Aircraft Co, Inc., Oklahoma City, Box 5 of 15; Closed Cases, 1943-1946; RG 228 and U.S. Census Bureau, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, "Age, Race, and Sex, by Counties: 1940 and 1930,"* 839. <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-volume-2/33973538v2p5ch8.pdf> (accessed July 31, 2021).

OCAD operated under military authority, the FEPC's relationship with the facility worked in different ways than with defense facilities under civilian contract like Douglass Aircraft in Oklahoma City and Tulsa and Spartan Aviation in Tulsa. Military leadership, who had been trained to follow orders, complied much more readily with FEPC dictates than civilian executives like J. Paul Getty and Donald Douglas.²⁰⁸

Despite the fundraising efforts of Industries Foundation, Inc., the city still needed to pass a \$500,000 bond issue to purchase land for the airport expansions and to construct buildings, and they needed black voters to support the measure. Black Oklahoma Citizens, however, were hesitant. In addition to memories of failed World War I promises, local African American organizations had recently supported ballot measures to subsidize Santa Fe Railroad facilities and to construction the Civil Center but neither yielded the jobs white politicians promised in exchange for black support. The Oklahoma City Negro Chamber of Commerce held a community meeting on April 4, 1941, to debate an endorsement for the ballot measure. Speakers included community members, city, and federal officials. The Chamber voted unanimously to endorse the bond issue, but only after receiving public assurances that they would receive an appropriate share of new jobs and some of those jobs had to be skilled.²⁰⁹

J. W. Sanford, president of the Negro Chamber of Commerce, told the assembled leaders of the city – white and black – that black Oklahoma Citizens were all in for the war effort. “We are for this program of National Defense. You can depend upon our loyalty now as in

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ “Bond Election Proposed for Defense Plants,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, March 21, 1941; “Negro C. of C. Endorses Bond Issue for Douglass Air Plant,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, April 4, 1941 and “Air Corps Ready to Start Depot Withing Month,” *the Daily Oklahoman*, April 09, 1941.

yesteryears.”²¹⁰ In exchange for black support, Oklahoma City Mayor Robert A. Hefner, and City Manager H. B. Bailey promised to do all they could to promote the use of blacks at the new air depot. More importantly, the mayor and city manager had made the promises in public. To remind white officials of their promises to black workers, the Chamber issued a statement at the end of the meeting vowing blacks would not remain silent patriots who could be ignored and still be depended upon to blindly support all measures related to World War II. Black Oklahoma Citians would not allow a repeat of the World War I home front. As J. W. Sanford put it “[we] will not settle for Negro work” geared to keep African Americans in low-level janitorial positions. Dunjee urged Mayor Hefner to realize he could not “deny opportunity to Negroes without . . . undermining opportunity for everyone,” in the city. Sanford further stressed to Hefner and the federal representatives that black loyalty had never been in question and never would be. The bond issue passed with overwhelming support throughout the city. Voters in African American districts passed the measure with the highest margin of support.²¹¹

Constructing the Oklahoma City Air Depot

White union officials in Oklahoma City initially succeeded in locking African Americans out of skilled labor positions during the construction phase of the Oklahoma City Air Depot. The most recidivist offender was the local United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners Union. Black leaders overcame this problem by forcing the FEPC and national union officials to reign-in

²¹⁰ “Oklahoma City Negroes Pledge Support of Bonds For Defense Projects Here,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, April 19, 1941.

²¹¹ “Citizens Join in Greater Oklahoma City Defense Program,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, April 19, 1941; “Oklahoma City Negroes Support Defense Bonds,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, May 3, 1941 and (quotes) “Oklahoma City Negroes Pledge Support of Bonds For Defense Projects Here,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, April 19, 1941.

recalcitrant local white leaders. The episode highlights the disconnect between stated national union policies and local union officials determined to exclude skilled black workers from defense construction jobs. By appealing to national and regional union leaders and the FEPC, black carpenters in Oklahoma City were awarded a segregated charter and hired as skilled carpenters at OCAD.

Building trade unions had long prevented the employment of skilled African American craftsmen in Oklahoma City. An interview published in the *Black Dispatch* on September 14, 1940, Father Clement A. Roack, the African American priest at St. Peter Claver Catholic Church, revealed just how much power local unions wielded. The church planned to add an addition to its existing structure. Father Roack signed a contract with local construction firm H. L. Sally with the stipulation that black workers had to be hired. The contractor said, after the contract had been signed, that local labor leaders would not allow the construction to proceed without union labor. The Father said he had no issue with union labor provided it was black. Sally claimed to be able to do nothing about the situation as “there were no [African Americans] admitted to [skilled] labor unions in Oklahoma City.” Black workers could only do unskilled work on the project. Father Roack could not believe a situation existed in which local unions could prevent skilled black congregants from working on their own church’s addition for which their tithes had paid. The priest partially prevailed and hired the black firm L. E. Lewis and Sons to complete the brickwork and James Else to handle plumbing. All other aspects were handled by white union labor. NAACP leaders viewed situations like these as nightmare scenarios that

could easily become the norm in defense industries. If local labor unions could not be controlled, their leaders could prevent blacks from holding any skilled labor positions.²¹²

Defense employers often worked with locals to reserve the highest paying jobs for whites. They pointed to a common fear that skilled white workers refuse to work with black workers, skilled or not. Speaking at the announcement in Washington, D.C., Dr. Robert C. Weaver, Administrative Assistant for Labor Supply, offered a guarantee that “organized labor [did] not intend to be an impediment to increased occupational opportunities” for black workers. The commitment to a racially inclusive home front created space for local African Americans to pressure the federal government and national union officials to intervene in, and remove, local union obstructionism.²¹³ Agreement or not, local labor officials drug their feet when it came to integrating African Americans into defense industries, especially skilled positions. As scholar Paul Moreno described it, although “AFL and CIO leaders repeatedly expressed their support for the FEPC, they often had difficulty controlling their member unions,” throughout the war years.²¹⁴

African American workers – especially in the building trades – found the most effective way to get around the opposition of recalcitrant locals was to form their own all-black locals and apply for charters from the national union. In late February of 1941, African American carpenters in Oklahoma City began meeting at the offices of the *Black Dispatch* to work with Roscoe Dungee and the NAACP. Later that same month, E. M. Dailey, chairman of the Black

²¹² “City Catholic Priest Charges Labor Unions Sought to Prevent Negroes,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, September 14, 1940.

²¹³ “A.F. of L. and C.I.O. to Fight Discrimination in National War Program,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, November 2, 1940.

²¹⁴ Paul D. Moreno, *Black Americans and Organized Labor: A New History*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 200.

carpenter's association announced the AFL had issued a charter to the new United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners Union, Local 859. Forty potential union brothers had contacted E. E. Warren the regional AFL organizer based in Tulsa. He traveled to Oklahoma City to resolve the issue and worked directly with P.J. McAlpine, secretary of the proposed local. Officers were installed and sworn in by Warren in the *Black Dispatch* offices. Afterward, J. W. Sanford, president of the Negro Chamber of Commerce, promised jobs on defense facility construction projects.²¹⁵

Reports detailing the numbers of skilled black workers on defense construction projects in Oklahoma City do not exist but looking at the totality of FEPC complaints and cases in Oklahoma City reveals no other complaints against unions in the city after the creation of the segregated carpenter's local in February 1941. Moreover, there are not any complaints in the records of the War Manpower Commission, which would have received them from February 1941 until the creation of the FEPC on June 25, 1941. Perhaps most telling, the ever-vigilant *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch* did not report any other instances of union trouble in the area. If incidents with union discrimination, it would have been covered on the front page.

Exact numbers of African Americans employed during the construction phase of OCAD have not survived, but general construction records of Douglas Aircraft in Oklahoma City are available to review. The numbers are instructive as both construction projects happened at roughly the same time – construction at OCAD began in 1941 and at Douglas in 1942 – and dealt with the same unions, therefore, the percentages of unskilled African Americans in various construction jobs at Douglas are likely similar to those for OCAD. Robert Brewer,

²¹⁵ "Negro Carpenters Unions Gets Charter," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, February 22, 1941.

Personnel Director for Austin Company Constructors and H. E. Eiber, Assistant Project Manager, reported employment estimates to the War Manpower Commission on October 28, 1942, that African Americans were employed as 10%-15% of Jackhammer Operators, 15%-20% of Cement Mixer Operators, 10% of Masons, and 60% of general laborers. Blacks were being hired for construction jobs at the Douglas Aircraft Oklahoma City construction site but were much more likely to be hired as a general laborer than into a skilled position. The percentages of black construction workers matches up will with the African American percentage of the population. Oklahoma City was 9.4% black with Oklahoma County coming in at 9.3%. Oklahoma County was part of the Oklahoma City labor market as identified by the WMC. African Americans were 7.6% of the total population of Canadian, Cleveland, Lincoln, Logan, Payne, Pottawatomie, and McClain counties. Regardless of which population statistic compared to, African Americans held jobs in numbers equal to or exceeding their portion of the population.²¹⁶

Training

L. K. Covelle, local director of the National Defense Program in Oklahoma, had assured attendees at the 1940 Langston Conference, that the issue of defense training of African Americans would be resolved. As of April 1942, however, Black Oklahoma Citians were still waiting for defense courses that would qualify them for high-paying skilled jobs in the new defense factories. Black activists, after winning federal support for job training for African

²¹⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, "Age, Race, and Sex, by Counties: 1940 and 1930,"* 824, 826, 827, 839. <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-volume-2/33973538v2p5ch8.pdf>; (accessed July 31, 2021) and Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, "War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports," November 4, 1942; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

Americans, now had to stop the State of Oklahoma from blocking said training. Led by Roscoe Dunjee, Oklahoma City's black leaders once again called on the federal government and forced local officials to publicly promise to commit to opening the training programs necessary for skilled positions to African Americans.

The initial unwillingness to provide training for African Americans was rooted in the Jim Crow educational policies of the State of Oklahoma. State leaders prevented African American leaders from securing approval for a training shift for African Americans at the federally funded school on North Broadway. In brief, state officials maintained Oklahoma law prevented blacks and whites from being educated together under any circumstances. By extension, Oklahoma Attorney General Mac Q. Williamson maintained black trainees could not be trained by whites, and since the state had no black trainers to teach skilled courses, blacks could not apply for skilled training, much less skilled jobs. Attorney General Williamson argued Oklahoma state law superseded any federal rules for training programs.²¹⁷

Since the first conference on black defense training at Langston in 1940, black Oklahomans had become increasingly militant in their efforts for wartime employment. The change was driven by two factors. Black Oklahoma Citizens worried their tax dollars, war bond purchases, and patriotism would fail to incorporate them more fully into the fabric of the United States, as they had in World War I. The second factor was more important. Since the June 25, 1941, issuance of Executive Order 8802, the federal government, via the newly created

²¹⁷ "C. of C. Passes First Hurdle in Defense Training School Fight," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, April 4, 1942; "Perky gets Copy of Letter to Dunjee," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, April 4, 1942 and "Attorney General Tells Training School Heads Negroes Can Legally Attend Training School," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, April 19, 1942.

FEPC, backed-up the militancy of black Oklahomans. The power dynamics between African Americans and Oklahoma officials committed to upholding Jim Crow had drastically shifted.

Black leaders continued to press white leaders to stop blocking job training for African Americans. On April 4, 1942, *The Black Dispatch*, announced it had a copy of a letter written by Attorney General Williamson that contradicted his recent public statements denying skilled training for African Americans. Armed with Attorney General Williamson's letter, Roscoe Dunjee called for another conference on April 18, 1942, to finally settle the issue of skilled training courses for blacks. Dunjee knew an acknowledgement from Williamson in a private letter would not carry much weight. At the meeting, Dunjee planned to get Williams to publicly confess his error so it could later be announced in the black press. Attendees included several black leaders from Oklahoma City, Attorney General Williamson, and M. L. Curtis, the director of Federal Training in Oklahoma City. Mr. Hisel, president of the Oklahoma City School Board, and Mr. Wrinkle, the city superintendent of schools, were scheduled to attend but did not show.²¹⁸

M. L. Curtis opened the meeting by telling the assembled group the primary problem as he saw it. "We have a request in Washington for \$173,000 worth of instructional equipment and at the present time none of us know what is going to happen. It may be six months and it may be longer before it arrives." He felt there was not enough equipment to operate a separate training school for African Americans. His position apparently being that blacks could not attend training classes in a "white building" when it was not being used by whites.²¹⁹ This was a

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

common extension of Oklahoma's Jim Crow argument. Locals convinced federal officials that the state's segregated school law meant if separate programs could not be established at the same time, whites had priority. Joseph Fisher, president of the Negro Chamber of Commerce, pointed out the ridiculousness of this position in wartime. "It looks to me as though one is almost unpatriotic who would force the government to purchase training equipment twice" and waste resources in a futile quest for black teachers that "do not exist." The only beneficiaries of the plan, according to Fisher, were Japan and Germany.²²⁰

Undeterred, Curtis continued by saying that even if the equipment existed to establish another school, no one could staff it. Manpower did not exist in sufficient quantity to allow workers to be pulled to become instructors. This discussion was theoretical since there were no black instructors or workers in skilled positions locally. Dunjee pointed out the labor shortage was exactly what local African Americans were attempting to alleviate. The endless quest for skilled black teachers with the required two years of experience created an inescapable catch-22.²²¹ Then, Dunjee sprang his trap. He asked Curtis if he considered the federal training school to be part of Oklahoma public schools as provided by the state constitution. Curtis, who did not know about Williamson's letter to Dunjee, affirmed he did believe it to be a public school based on statements and opinions made by Attorney General Williamson. Dunjee announced to the group that he had the letter with him and asked Williamson if he would like to read it aloud. To do so would be to admit publicly he, Williamson, had been wrong to say white federal instructors could not train blacks in Oklahoma. Williamson declined to do so.

²²⁰ "Attorney General Tells Training School Heads Negroes Can Legally Attend Training School," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, April 19, 1942

²²¹ *Ibid.*

Instead, Attorney General Williamson questioned Curtis, the Federal training director, about how individuals were admitted to the school operated by the federal government. Curtis explained potential students had to score high enough on aptitude tests.²²² After listening and being further goaded by Dunjee, the attorney general admitted that the “qualifications for entering public schools” in Oklahoma were “radically different” and the fact that the facility instructed individuals over the age of 21 meant they could not be classified as “public” schools of Oklahoma. Dunjee asked for confirmation. “Is there anything in the laws of this state that would prevent Mr. Curtis and the Oklahoma City School Board” from allowing white teachers to instruct black workers on a third shift at the federal school. While unwilling to agree federal law superseded Oklahoma State law, Williamson did acknowledge state law did not extend to federally operated schools.²²³

Dunjee’s next objective was to secure public confirmation that blacks being trained in area segregated high schools were really learning skills needed for war work. Again, the editor knew full well that blacks were being given the wrong welding instruction, but he needed it to be acknowledged on the record so it could be reported. So, Dunjee grilled Federal Training Director Curtis about what type of welding program was being offered at Frederick Douglass High School. Lewis Clymer, minorities placement specialist for the War Manpower Commission – and an African American – recently warned Dunjee to make sure training centers offered the appropriate welding courses for defense work. Traditionally, acetylene gas welding had been utilized in production facilities, but new aircraft assembly plants had adapted to the newer

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

technology of arc – also known as electric – welding. Training in acetylene welding would disqualify African Americans from skilled positions at the Air Depot and Douglas Aircraft, Oklahoma City.²²⁴

Curtis admitted that African Americans training in welding at segregated Frederick Douglass High School were only learning the obsolete acetylene type. Whites being trained at the federally funded school were learning arc welding which was crucial for aircraft assembly work. Like the situation in Tulsa, the Oklahoma City School Board, Attorney General Williamson, and Mr. Curtis, the federal director, were teaching African Americans a skill they knew would prevent them from working at area aviation facilities. The pressure and public admissions by local officials worked. A month later Douglass High School began offering arc welding and had stopped training acetylene welding altogether. Classes in aircraft sheet metal and aircraft electricity were also newly on offer at the segregated high schools and federally operated training facilities on Broadway.²²⁵

Working at the Oklahoma City Air Depot

On December 12, 1942, the *Dispatch* bragged “City Man Lands War Plant Job,” James Simpson, World War I veteran and part-time photographer at the *Black Dispatch*, was the first African American man hired into a skilled mechanical position at OCAD. The announcement ended with a snarky “whether his employment had anything to do with disclosures here or racial prejudice in the allotment of work in war production place, is not known.” Simpson’s story is among the earliest success stories, in the Oklahoma City FEPC files and Dunjee and his

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid. and “Defense Employment Opens Up For Negroes,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, May 2, 1942.

paper played a direct role.²²⁶ Progress seemed to have seemed to have arrived at OCAD, but the work of Dunjee and the FEPC to ensure black mechanics continued to be hired and treated in a manner appropriate to their station had only just begun.

Through the work of the local NAACP and the federally-backed FEPC, skilled black men were successfully placed as aircraft mechanics at OCAD by early 1943. The effort to secure equal employment opportunities began with the hiring of skilled black mechanics, but the effort did not stop there. White officials at OCAD worked to keep a permanent division between black and white skilled workers. Evidence shows that faced with the arrival of black mechanics at OCAD, company officials sought to maintain Jim Crow however they could. Black mechanics were segregated from white ones -- a situation allowed under FEPC regulations -- whenever possible. OCAD sought to bolster white supremacy in the workplace by exclusively assigning black men menial jobs below their skilled capacities. The facility also worked to ensure that black mechanics were paid less than their white counterparts and denied black men the same promotions and job titles as whites, but Dunjee and the NAACP successfully fought back. The situation with black mechanics demonstrates the effectiveness of local NAACP officials using the FEPC to push forward civil rights in the workplace beyond merely seeing black workers hired on defense projects.

In the pages of Dunjee's *Black Dispatch*, readers learned about the importance of the FEPC, how it worked, and how to utilize the agency to file complaints. Dunjee volunteered to personally steer anyone through the complaint process that needed assistance. Additionally,

²²⁶ "City Man Lands War Plant Job," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, December 12, 1942.

the *Dispatch* provided weekly pressure for black employment gains by reporting on complaints, organizing exposés, and printing blistering articles and editorials about anyone who tried to stop employment progress. From 1942 through 1943, blacks in Oklahoma City, in cooperation with the FEPC, saw African Americans hired at OCAD in skilled positions as mechanics, plumbers, typists. Furthermore, the threat of federal intervention from the FEPC also allowed African Americans to integrate cafeterias at the facility by the end of the war, an accomplishment far beyond the mandates of Executive Order 8802. The first major complaint examined here deals with a group of black men who, after being hired as skilled mechanics in early 1942, continued to fight for raises, promotions, and work assignments equal to their white counterparts.

Mechanics

Black officials successfully saw James Simpson, an African American man hired in December of 1943 as a skilled mechanic at OCAD, as a huge coup for black activists that opened the door for all other black mechanics in the city. Despite that victory, Dunjee knew the fight for employment gains continued. On February 6, 1943, Dunjee contacted William R. Trumbull, commanding officer at OCAD to discuss the experiences of James Simpson and other skilled black mechanics working at the facility. Black men had been hired as skilled mechanics, but they were not paid the same, given the opportunity for advancement, or given the same work assignments as white mechanics. The men were not permitted to do any mechanic work. Each day, he, and other black mechanics, washed airplane engine parts. Black mechanics were not

even allowed disassemble airplane engines. The denial of promotions, wage increases, and work assignments were not in line with FEPC policies.²²⁷

Dunjee knew Simpson's story well as his housekeeper married the man years earlier and worked at the paper. Given this connection, Simpson's quest for a skilled position as a mechanic, likely had been orchestrated by Dunjee and the NAACP to push OCAD, and the FEPC, to clear the way for skilled black mechanics. The editor later initiated a similar drive to assist women in securing skilled positions as typists.²²⁸

James Simpson's assignment for the first week of his job as a junior aircraft mechanic consisted of dismantling aircraft engines. The next week, his assignment changed to the cleaning department where he washed engine parts in gasoline. Dunjee noted this seemed odd as all new employees had a probationary period after which time they were reevaluated to determine if their employment would continue. The NAACP leader asked Trumbull how he should advise Simpson, and others like him, to acquire the necessary knowledge to ensure continued skilled employment when they only washed parts. Three African Americans had by that time been hired as junior aircraft engine mechanics, but all of them only washed engine parts all day, together. As a result, none could develop the requisite skills required to pass the probationary period.²²⁹

Simpson had no complaints about his salary or treatment at OCAD. After all, OCAD paid him the junior mechanic salary of \$1800 for the work of a common laborer. Dunjee suggested

²²⁷ Roscoe Dunjee to Colonel William R. Turnbull, February 6, 1943; February 6, 1943; Cases Closed: Robert Young, Box 11 of 15, Cases Closed, 1943-1945, RG 228.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

to Trumbull the situation was an inefficient way to pursue a war effort in addition to being discriminatory. As important and expensive as the war effort was, employees “shouldn’t be paid \$1800 to do classified labor when there [were] thousands of unemployed in the ranks of common laborers who would be happy to do this work for \$1200.” Instead of complaining about labor shortages and running help wanted advertisements, OCAD officials should use “all possible skilled workers in all possible fields.”²³⁰ Everyone at OCAD who dealt with James Simpson treated him pleasantly, but no one ever discussed changing his employment status or job assignment with him. “He [had], however, been doing considerable thinking himself” and he could not understand how he could be doing unskilled work for the war effort when he worked in a skilled position in the last world war. In fact, he worked as a mechanic his entire life. Dunjee ends his missive stressing that he does not believe the commanding officer to be at fault, but, rather, unaware of the situation as he surely would put a stop to such unpatriotic violations of FEPC rules.²³¹

The continued unwillingness of white supervisors to give African American mechanics tasks and opportunities commensurate with their skills, promoted six men, with Dunjee’s aid, to file an FEPC complaint alleging OCAD discriminated against them by refusing to properly upgrade black mechanics as they did white ones. At this time the FEPC was being reorganized under Executive Order 9346 which established regional offices so that cases could be handled more quickly rather than waiting for the limited resources of the FEPC in Washington to take interest. Oklahoma, located in Region IX, fell under the authority of Roy A. Hoglund at the

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

Kansas City office. In June of 1942, the Oklahoma City NAACP – now aided by Roy A. Hoglund, Region IX director and Lewis Clymer, a black man who served as regional representative for the War Manpower Commission – continued the battle for skilled black mechanics to be paid, promoted, and given skilled work into the summer of 1943.²³²

The details of the men's individual stories reveal a facility in which low-level supervisory positions were often held by local whites committed to discrimination while military officials held all upper managerial positions. Those at the top were committed to the war effort and the uninterrupted flow of overhauled engines to aid said effort. Dedicated to getting airplane engines to the frontlines as soon as possible, commanding officers had no incentive to look for FEPC violations after blacks were hired. This meant white supervisors committed to isolating and underpaying black workers had a free hand unless someone complained and brought the situation to the attention of a commanding officer.

Having grown frustrated with promises of OCAD to investigate their situation, the men under the guidance of Roscoe Dunjee, filed an FEPC complaint and continued to up the pressure for a satisfactory resolution by telling their stories to as many officials as possible. This tactic meant the FEPC and OCAD would be contacted by several different government officials to inquire if the situation had been resolved. In short, each additional official contacted for assistance would then contact their superiors, the FEPC, and OCAD. The constant stream of communication made the prospect of ignoring the men's complaints futile.²³³

²³² Robert Young et al to Mr. Albert St. Aubin, Civil Service Commission Director, June 28, 1943; Cases Closed: Robert Young, Box 11 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945, RG 228.

²³³ Ibid.

In a June 28, 1943, letter to Albert St. Aubin, director, Civil Service Commission in Oklahoma City, James W. Moore, originally hired as a general mechanic helper, and Aguinaldos D. Bradley, originally hired as junior aircraft mechanic, complained about the “very unpleasant situation” faced by black members of the cleaning section in the Engine Repair Department. The men worked in the same department as James Simpson. Based on the men’s complaint, OCAD continued to hire skilled black mechanics in accordance with previous FEPC efforts, and continued to use the men for only unskilled work.²³⁴

The complaints documented the black mechanics’ mistreatment by their white foreman, G. Shall, especially his efforts to prevent them from receiving promotions and raises. In a June 1943 department meeting, Shall told the complainants they would not be getting raises of more than \$60.00 per year for the duration of the war. This made their maximum potential salary \$1740.00 each year. The foreman stressed no black man should have any other expectations. At the same meeting, several white men were promoted from Mechanic Helper to Junior Mechanic. The black men noted they “would now never make more than the peak salary of white women.” Additionally, Shall noted, they should not be surprised at their positions because African Americans were the only people who could “stand” that type of work without being injured. The signatories noted “a check with the first aid station at OCAD [would] clearly divulge the conditions undergone” by black workers in the cleaning section.²³⁵

They wrote to the commission to demand equal opportunity on the shop floor. The men were qualified to work as skilled mechanics, and therefore, knew they should be able to

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

“receive the same promotions enjoyed by the white men.” One of the commission’s duties was to ensure “justice to all persons . . . regardless of race, creed, or color.” The men hoped the Civil Service Commission would live up to its standards. Each man offered to produce a reference from all former employers and statements from men who had already quit OCAD. They told St. Aubin they had drafted complaints to send to the Regional Civil Service Commission and various national offices – including the FEPC – “in the event no action [was] forthcoming.” The men assured St. Aubin they believed the complaints would never be sent because they knew him to be “deeply concerned with upholding the regulations of the Civil Service Commission. [They left] the matter in his hands feeling confident that justice would be forthcoming. Even here, African American complainants used the threat of federal intervention to motivate change in state and local level authorities for not treating skilled black workers equitably at defense facilities.²³⁶

By the time the letter addressed to St. Aubin made its way to Roy A. Hoglund’s FEPC office there had been developments in the men’s cases. Officials at OCAD, after being harassed, acted on behalf of the black mechanics. Their salaries were now equitable with white counterparts holding the same position and length of employment. Aguinaldos D. Bradley, now had a salary of \$2200 per year but he and the other black mechanics still washed airplane parts.²³⁷

On September 23, 1943, Clarence Mitchell, Jr., African American official at the national offices of the NAACP, contacted Dunjee for additional information on the complaint of Moore

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid.

and Bradley. He worried “a very ugly feeling [was] being created at the Oklahoma City Air Depot resulting from a multitude of complaints.” Depending on what Dunjee could uncover, Mitchell believed an official probe into the situation at OCAD “would have wholesome effect.”²³⁸ Region IX Director Roy A. Hoglund contacted Dunjee to pick up on Mitchell’s calls for an investigation. He apologized for the delay and referenced the “considerable correspondence from [Dunjee] with reference to complaints against” OCAD. Hoglund planned to meet with Clarence Mitchell and Roscoe Dunjee in Washington, D.C. to advance the causes of the men. Dunjee personally delivered his files relating to the men’s cases during the meeting and continued to gather information after returning home.²³⁹

Next, Roy Hoglund notified OCAD on December 4, 1943, that the Kansas City office of the FEPC had received several complaints charging the facility of being in violation of Executive Order 9346 and fair employment practices. As a result, he planned to visit the facility to conduct a personal investigation on behalf of the FEPC. Hoglund specifically highlighted the complaints against Foreman Shall in the Engine Repair Department who told Moore and Bradley, that they:

“could never hope to advance beyond a maximum salary of \$1740.00; that because they were Negroes they could never be classified a Junior Mechanics; a Negro man in this department could not advance beyond the maximum wage paid white women; that the reason they were employed in their present capacities was they could stand the particular type of work they were doing better than a white man; that each of these men was qualified for promotion on the basis of several years of experience with gasoline motors.”²⁴⁰

²³⁸ Robert Young, et. al. to Clarence Mitchell and Roscoe Dunjee, September 21, 1943; Cases Closed: Robert Young, Box 11 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945, RG 228.

²³⁹ Roy A. Hoglund, to Roscoe Dunjee, December 4, 1943; Cases Closed: Robert Young, Box 11 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945, RG 228.

²⁴⁰ Roy A. Hoglund to Commanding Officer, OKC Air Service Command, December 4, 1943; Cases Closed: Robert Young, Box 11 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945; RG 228.

The FEPC complaint successfully prompted OCAD to take action to improve the situations of Black workers. Lt. Russell W. Slocum responded that zero discrimination existed at OCAD and offered updates on the complaints as supporting evidence:

“James W. Moore was employed as a General Mechanic Helper 2-8-43 at a rate of \$1500 per annum and was promoted to a Jr. Aircraft Engine Mechanic at a rate of \$1860 per annum on October 16, 1943.

Aguinaldos D. Bradley was employed 1-4-43 at \$1860 per annum as a Jr. Aircraft Mechanic and was promoted 8-10-43 to \$2200 per annum as an Aircraft Engine Mechanic.”²⁴¹

Slocum believed this information cleared the facility of any wrongdoing or non-compliance. Both men advanced at an above average pace compared to the employees overall for the department in which they worked. In some cases, the advancement exceeded that of white employees. To make absolutely certain the situation had been resolved appropriately, Hoglund asked each complainant to confirm OCAD really did what it promised. Still disturbed by the men’s corroborated report of the meeting with Shall, the white foreman, Hoglund continued to dig.²⁴² In February 1944, Lewis Clymer and Roy Hoglund from the Region IX offices of the FEPC and WMC met in Oklahoma City to conference with Dunjee and then original complainants, tour the facility themselves, and meet with Slocum, now chief of the Civilian Personnel Section.²⁴³

Moore and Bradley had complained about a pay inequality, a lack of promotions, and only being allowed to clean airplane engine parts. They got two out of three of those things,

²⁴¹ Robert Young, et. al. to Roy A Hoglund, December 6, 1943; Cases Closed: Robert Young, Box 11 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945; RG 228.

²⁴² Roy A. Hoglund to Robert Young, et al, December 23, 1943; Cases Closed: Robert Young, Box 11 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945; RG 228.

²⁴³ Roy A. Hoglund to Roscoe Dunjee, February 24, 1944; Cases Closed: Robert Young, Box 11 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945; RG 228.

raises and promotions. Even though the men did not manage to integrate the ranks of mechanics repairing or disassembling engines, their victories were a huge boon to all black workers throughout the facility who now could point to the FEPC's successful efforts to get skilled black workers not only hired – a huge win in itself – but pay raises and promotions equal to those received by their white counterparts. The importance of the FEPC's resolution of the complaint to all other black workers at OCAD is confirmed by the absence of any other FEPC complaints being filed against the facility accusing pay and promotion discrimination because of race for the remainder of the war.²⁴⁴

Additionally, James Simpson, husband of Dunjee's housekeeper, now worked at tasks appropriate for a Junior Aircraft Mechanic and made \$2200 per year. Abram Ross, a man fired by a racist white supervisor the previous year, was reinstated at OCAD and assigned to a department with a different supervisor. Ross' success, according to Roy Hoglund, happened due to "the efforts of Mr. Dunjee of the Black Dispatch who succeeded in getting a re-hearing for Mr. Ross," an unusual achievement. Finally, Mr. Jackson, the "Colored Personnel Counselor" at OCAD required the foreman who originally informed black men in the department they would never be promoted to bring the men together and personally apologize for his false statements. Think of it, the white supervisor who recently tried to humiliate the black mechanics in front of their peers by telling them they would never be promoted or paid like white workers required

²⁴⁴ Robert Young, et. al. to Roy A Hoglund, December 6, 1943; Cases Closed: Robert Young, Box 11 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945; RG 228.

to personally apologize the offended parties, a situation that simply would not have happened without the FEPC.²⁴⁵

In addition to the mechanics who successfully used the FEPC to achieve appropriate raises, promotions and work details, other African Americans were hired into skilled mechanic positions in 1943. Truman K. Gibson, Acting Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, reported to the FEPC that several African Americans mechanics were working at OCAD. The list of mechanics demonstrates the successes of the FEPC in Oklahoma, as well as the agency's limitations. As of September 16, 1943, there were 181 African Americans working as mechanics – all skilled positions – at OCAD. There were 18 black mechanics working in positions indicating they had received a promotion. Positions included Junior Aircraft Mechanic, Junior Aircraft Engine Mechanic, Jr General Mechanic, and Learner Mechanic. The largest numbers of skilled black mechanics, however, occupied the lowest categories with corresponding salaries. In total there were 163 mechanics holding the rank of General Helper Mechanic or Learner Mechanics. These results are indicative of an FEPC that produced results, not miracles. Black mechanics in Oklahoma City made significant inroads at OCAD. Even if most of those skilled workers remained in the lowest categories and salary rates, they were all hired as skilled workers at a major defense installation.²⁴⁶ OCAD's reporting on these positions only listed the number of African Americans in skilled positions, it did not indicate the number of positions held by

²⁴⁵ "OCAD Office Memorandum in re: Oklahoma City Air Depot," February 25, 1944; Cases Closed: Robert Young, Box 11 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945; RG 228 and Roy A. Hogleund to Roscoe Dunjee, February 24, 1944; Cases Closed: Robert Young, Box 11 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945; RG 228.

²⁴⁶ Russell W. Slocum, Lt. Col., Air Corps, Chief, Civilian Personnel Section to Roy A. Hogleund, December 6, 1943; Cases Closed: Robert Young, Box 11 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945; RG 228 and Truman K. Gibson, Acting Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War to George M. Johnson, Assistant to the FEPC Chairman, President's Committee on Fair Employment Practice, September 16, 1943; Cases Closed: Robert Young, Box 11 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945; RG 228.

whites. This makes comparisons of blacks in skilled positions with population numbers in Oklahoma City not possible.

Unskilled Laborers

Paul Abernathy began working as a packer at OCAD in June of 1943 but had been at the facility in some capacity since construction began. For the seven months before his work as a packer, he served as foreman of the black labor pool. Then, while stacking 50-gallon drums of oil one of them fell loose and landed on Mr. Abernathy injuring his back. He was admitted to the McBride Clinic – a bone and joint hospital – and kept for a “period” of time. When released from the facility he returned to work with the blessing of his doctor, provided he only did light work. He took his doctor's orders to his supervisor, Albert D. Bear, who assigned him the lighter tasks. The same day he reported back to work, however, he encountered a different white supervisor who demanded Abernathy resume his previous heavy work assignment. When told of Abernathy's injuries and work requirements the white supervisor said: “You'll either return to the loading crew or quit.” Mr. Abernathy refused and was fired. He had been told the federal government pays “compensation to persons so injured” and that he desired an investigation. He was also a World War I veteran who tried to do his part for the war effort only to end up unemployed with injuries and no prospects. He swore an affidavit for his FEPC complaint on September 1, 1943. Abernathy alleged improper dismissal based on his race by OCAD.²⁴⁷

In response to Paul Abernathy's claim of improper dismissal, the facility maintained his injury and light work requirement had nothing to do with his termination. Even though, the

²⁴⁷ Paul Abernathy, “Affidavit,” September 1, 1943; Cases Closed: Robert Young, Box 11 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945; RG 228.

firing occurred immediately after his conversation with the unnamed lieutenant. Instead, a few days after his return, the officer in charge of his department found him “loafing” in a section unrelated to his work assignment. “He was told to return to the light duty which was assigned to him and again the employee refused the assignment.” This occurrence resulted in his termination on June 10, 1943. “He was not fired because of race,” the facility maintained. Lt. Slocum felt Abernathy had been given too much consideration considering he constantly loafed on the job and wandered to other buildings. He often arrived at work “not in a cooperative frame of mind.” Any responsibility for Abernathy’s situation lay with him, not racism and not the facility. Slocum assured Hoglund the facility knew and followed all FEPC guidance as proven by the fact that “close observation and continual investigations” by Washington agencies failed to reveal any wrongdoing.²⁴⁸

Although Abernathy did not get rehired at OCAD, his case is important because it demonstrates the FEPC took complaints of employment discrimination seriously and investigated such complaints with due diligence. When investigations revealed an improper dismissal had occurred, as in the case of Abram Ross, the FEPC required OCAD to rehire black workers. If investigations showed evidence that a dismissal had occurred for appropriate reasons, as in the case of Paul Abernathy, the FEPC allowed the termination to stand. Even more important, OCAD’s detailed explanation of why Abernathy’s termination was not based on race demonstrates that the facility knew FEPC regulations and tried to operate within them. This FEPC policy awareness, and the results it produced, are especially evident when considering that in the same response OCAD explained why they were right about Abernathy,

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

they admitted they had been wrong about Abram Ross and the aircraft mechanics and had already begun working to correct the situation. Additionally, OCAD announced in the same letter new further evidence of black men receiving promotions.

Jewell J.D. Preston was appointed as a Classified Laborer at a rate of \$1200 per annum 2-6-43 and was promoted to Sr. Laborer at a rate of \$1320 per annum 5-1-43. He resigned as Sr. Laborer at \$1320 per annum 7-18-43.

Alvin E. Love was appointed as a Classified Laborer at \$1200 per annum 1-8-43 and was promoted to Sr Laborer at \$1320 per annum 7-19-43.²⁴⁹

OCAD also provided a report on James G. Howard who began at the facility in December 1942 as a laborer making \$1200 per year as a Classified Laborer. On May 1, 1943, he was promoted to General Mechanic Helper making \$1500 per year. Howard's promotion from unskilled laborer to a skilled offers evidence of an absence of employment discrimination at OCAD and the influence of the FEPC. The constant pressure of Dunjee's newspaper and local NAACP officials combined with the support of the FEPC, a federal agency, yielded results. FEPC complaints were investigated, and positive action taken where appropriate in accordance with the mandates of the FEPC.²⁵⁰

Cafeteria Access and Integration

At OCAD, workers also utilized FEPC to ensure equal access to public spaces, a departure from the committee's original mandate. The second complaint examined here deals with discrimination in break and food facilities for black workers on the overnight shift at OCAD. Laura Cato, an African American, worked as a janitress overnight at OCAD. Cato wrote directly to President Roosevelt October 6, 1943. Her letter included a petition focused on African

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

American access to cafeterias at the facility. “We the undersigned Negro employees on the midnight shift at the Oklahoma City Air Service Command, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, petition you to see that cafeteria service is provided for us.” During the day, separate cafeteria facilities for African Americans were operated but they closed at night. The small cafeteria that did operate overnight prohibited black employees from entering, even to purchase food to carry-out. Waitresses were forbidden from serving people of color in any capacity. There were some white women who offered to purchase food on behalf of black workers, but even they were not allowed to buy more than one item each to prevent this practice. Cafeteria manager Truman H. Fairless made it known any employee serving African Americans would be terminated.²⁵¹

The previous solution offered by OCAD allowed one black male employee – Earl E. Flowers, Janitor-Foreman – to go to the back door of the small cafeteria. He had to place all orders and purchase food for black overnight workers, and he had to do it in one trip. Black workers had no idea why, but even this option had been suspended recently. All they knew is that a sign now hung saying cafeteria workers could no longer sell food to African Americans whatsoever. The petition ended by pointing out African Americans were crucial to the war effort and would appreciate being treated as such:

“We all do our bit to help win the war, and we are willing to make any sacrifice that our country demands. Most of us are regular purchasers of war bonds. All of us pay some income tax through the payroll plan. A representative of each family is in the armed services, fighting to make Democracy a reality.

This act of unfairness, practiced at the model air service command of the nation, lowers the morale of all Negro citizens, as well as that of those directly affected. We shall appreciate any consideration that is given this matter.

²⁵¹ Laura Cato to President Franklin Roosevelt, October 6, 1943; Cases Closed C: Laura Cato, Box 11 of 15; Region IX, 1943-1946; RG: 228.

Respectfully submitted, Laura Cato, Maw E. McCain, Eva M. Johnson, Earl E. Flowers, Richard Ramsey, Nathaniel Graham, E.J. Hood, Orange Goldsmith, Octavia L. Bush, Hattie B. Swope, Curtis O. Houston, Johnnie R. Goldsmith, Willie Sango Holdenville.”²⁵²

Eugene Davidson, Assistant Director Field Operations for the FEPC sent a copy of Cato’s petition to Truman K. Gibson at the War Department and asked that the facility pay particular attention to the problem of no cafeteria service for African Americans on the overnight shift.²⁵³

After more than a month passed without update, Roy Hogleund checked-in to see the progress of the case.²⁵⁴ Mr. Gibson, manager of food operations at the facility, reported “a separate [black] cafeteria operates for the convenience of 1,932 Negro employees at this station.” He claimed the hours of operation were the same for white or black employees. They served from 5:30 A.M. to 8:15 A.M.; 9:15 A.M. to 1:15 P.M. and 2:15 P.M. to 8:00 P.M. During those hours, all employees had access to the same food, but black employees had to get it from a separate cafeteria.²⁵⁵

The facility also had a small canteen selling coffee and sandwiches 24 hours per day, for whites only. Gibson pointed out that the segregated cafeteria was only about 100 feet from the canteen. He claimed that changes had been made to “provide services to the Negroes the same as the whites.” During the third shift, “for the convenience of Negro employees” working

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ Eugene Davidson, Assistant Director, Field Operations War Manpower Commission, to Truman K. Gibson, Acting Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, October 29, 1943; Cases Closed C: Laura Cato, Box 11 of 15; Region IX, 1943-1946; RG: 228.

²⁵⁴ Roy A. Hogleund to Will Maslow, Director of Field Operations War Manpower Commission, December 1, 1943; Cases Closed C: Laura Cato, Box 11 of 15; Region IX, 1943-1946; RG: 228.

²⁵⁵ Laura Cato, Final Disposition Report, Roy A. Hogleund to Clarence M. Mitchell, February 28, 1945; Cases Closed C: Laura Cato, Box 11 of 15; Region IX, 1943-1946; RG: 228.

overnight, black workers were permitted to use the north entrance of the white canteen, make their purchases, and then eat in the segregated cafeteria space.²⁵⁶

Hoglund, on March 2, 1944, gave Cato the contents of the report. He noted the report from Mr. Gibson heavily, if not entirely, contradicted Laura Cato's version of the situation at OCAD. As a result, and due to OCAD's long history of discriminatory practices, Hoglund asked Cato to write back with her thoughts on the report. He asked, "are black workers able to purchase food at the canteen between 12 A.M. and 8 A.M. or do you still have to send one person to the back door?" He also requested she speak with the people who signed the petition to see if they have any additional information about black access to the cafeteria on the overnight shift.²⁵⁷

March 30, 1944, Cato responded. The cafeteria situation had improved during the overnight shift, but it remained unsatisfactory. The cafeteria sold food to African Americans again, but they still had to go to the back door of the kitchen to purchase it. The only concession had been that black workers could take turns going to the back door to order food instead of just one person being allowed. Hoglund, in earlier communications with Gibson and Cato had asked if it would be possible to have black workers to use a different door than whites so that they could order food inside, at least. Gibson did not address that question in his response, but Cato did in hers. Having black employees use the North door instead of the South would not be a viable solution. "Even if we were allowed to go to the North door, as you stated, this would be a discriminatory practice as the South door is the one generally used."

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Roy A. Hoglund to Laura Cato, March 2, 1944; Cases Closed C: Laura Cato, Box 11 of 15; Region IX, 1943-1946; RG: 228.

Furthermore, the door's location made it inaccessible. There was not a gate from the street or sidewalks to the South door. Until very recently “even the paths were blocked for paving work.” The twenty-night shift workers she spoke with said the canteen was still not open to African Americans, but the segregated cafeteria space was now unlocked if black employees would like to take their break inside. This was hardly a coup as the space did not serve food and did have heating or lighting overnight.²⁵⁸ Upon reading Cato’s response, Hogle and Mitchell reopened the investigation.²⁵⁹

Laura Cato eventually triumphed in her quest for equitable food access. February 28, 1945, Hogle visited the facility in a personal capacity to view the progress for himself. He ate in the cafeteria and inquired about food service during the night shift. An officer with direct supervision over the cafeteria and canteen said the canteen is open all night for the use of both black and white workers. All could now purchase food in the canteen and sit at the “tables in the canteen with no segregation of any type.” He noted that any segregation still occurring had to be voluntary. The company made this enlightened change after finding it cost prohibitive to operate two canteens overnight.²⁶⁰ Hogle attempted to contact the original signers of Laura Cato’s petition but could not locate them. He did speak with Dunjee to learn about any recent complaints about canteen service on the third shift. No one had any to report.²⁶¹

²⁵⁸ Laura Cato to Clarence Mitchell, Associate Director of Field Operations, FEPC, March 30, 1944; Cases Closed C: Laura Cato, Box 11 of 15; Region IX, 1943-1946; RG 228.

²⁵⁹ Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, “War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports,” April 8, 1944; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

²⁶⁰ Final Disposition Report, Laura Cato, Roy A. Hogle, Regional Director FEPC to Clarence M. Mitchell, February 28, 1945; Cases Closed C: Laura Cato, Box 11 of 15; Region IX, 1943-1946; RG: 228.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Hoglund noted that since no issue of equal job opportunities were alleged in the original complaint, only equal canteen services, “there may [have been] some doubt” about his jurisdiction. He still worked to press the issue. With the case adjusted satisfactorily, he closed the case against the cafeteria(s) operating at OCAD.²⁶²

Typists

Women seeking skilled employment at OCAD were not as successful as men, but the story is still important to understanding how black Oklahoma Citians worked with the FEPC to ensure that black women also benefited from skilled wartime employment. In October of 1942, the Oklahoma City NAACP and the *Black Dispatch* executed a plan to test the willingness of the Depot to hire qualified black women for skilled administrative positions in compliance with FEPC regulations. Freddye Harper Williams and Christeria Coffey applied for positions as typists at the facility. The women were ideal candidates for this type of operation. Christeria Coffey had been a teacher for twelve years and Freddye Williams worked as a reporter and office administrator at the *Black Dispatch*. Both were well educated with extensive professional experience which would make it difficult to justify why they had not been hired. The women would either be hired and become trailblazers or the women’s failed efforts would be reported to the FEPC and in the pages of the *Black Dispatch*. The NAACP hoped to pressure OCAD into action using the threats of an FEPC investigation and bad publicity.²⁶³

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ “FEPC Complaint,” Freddye Williams to Lewis Clymer, Minorities Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, October 31, 1942; Folder Cases Closed W: Freddye Williams, Box 11 of 15; Region IX, 1943-1946; RG 228; Freddye Williams, “I talked with Raymond H. Griffin,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, November 21, 1942 and Christeria Coffey, “I talked with Floyd E. Payne,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, November 21, 1942.

Freddye Harper Williams registered with the Civil Service offices located at Douglas Aircraft in Oklahoma City and at OCAD, she earned a 94 rating on her Civil Service examination. The rank qualified her for a junior typist position. The same day she registered at the facilities, the personnel office at OCAD called her home to inquire about her availability. They hired her at the end of the call and asked her to report to the personnel office the next day for fingerprinting and processing. Williams did not wait. She immediately went to OCAD. After reporting, she spoke with Floyd E. Payne, chief clerk of the Quartermaster's Office. During her interview, Payne took her paperwork and asked her the same questions she had answered on the application. His questioning required her to repeat her job history, education level, and her qualifications over and over. Williams later reported she thought Payne tried to confuse her, or make it look like she lied on the application because he wanted an excuse to not hire a woman of her qualifications. Eventually, Payne cut to the chase. He told Williams the call she received instructing her to report for fingerprinting and employment was not an indication she had been hired, nor was the current interview. In fact, Payne, told Williams, OCAD had not hired any African Americans in the office, "although there were 15 colored men in the shipping department." He promised to notify Williams should the office ever need her. While she waited to see Payne, she had visual confirmation discriminatory practices. A white woman came in and was quickly put to work. Williams also managed to get a look at Payne's desktop. There was a paper with the names of six women recommended by the Civil Service. Listed at the top Freddye H. Williams, with the highest rating²⁶⁴

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

When Williams returned home, she received another call from OCAD again asking her to report for processing. The next morning, Williams met with Raymond H. Griffin, the lead personnel officer at OCAD. He asked to see her documents, but Payne had not returned them to her the previous day. Griffin instructed her to return home and wait for him to call to inform her which department to report to work on Monday. This marked the third time Williams had been told she had a job in two days. After not hearing from Griffin by mid-afternoon, she doggedly called back, but he was unavailable. She asked the office staff if Griffin had determined in which department she would be working as a junior-typist. Williams again offered to return to OCAD immediately and wait for Griffin if that would expedite the situation. The OCAD representative asked her to wait at home. At 3:00 P.M. she reached Griffin who informed her the, unfortunately, all the junior-typist positions had been filled. She reminded him that he had promised her a position. If he had not been serious, why did he call, she asked. At this point Griffin became angry and said he had simply forgotten there were no jobs left when he called her. Claiming she and the situation were giving him "a headache," he ended the call. Before he could disconnect, Williams thanked him for his time and reminded him that she was still available for work if she could do anything to help with the war effort in the future.²⁶⁵

Christeria Coffey's experience was similar. Considering her experience as a teacher, bookkeeper, typist for the black County Agent, and work as a store clerk, it is no surprise Coffey's Civil Service Exam qualified her to work as a junior typist in October 1942. Regardless of Civil Service ranking and qualifications, Raymond H. Griffin, personnel manager at OCAD

²⁶⁵ Freddie H. Williams to Lewis Clymer, Minorities Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, October 31, 1942; Cases Closed C: Laura Cato, Box 11 of 15; 1943-1946; RG 228.

seemed confused to see a black women come into his office. Coffey presented him a letter noting the scheduled interview for a junior typist position. After a cursory review of her documents, Griffin flatly stated that “he did not interview colored girls for office work.” The only jobs available for African Americans at the depot were held by black men working as plumbers and mechanics. Griffin, claiming pressing duties, asked Coffey to leave with a promise to contact her she the policy on black typists change. Coffey asked just when that would be, Griffin declined to speculate.²⁶⁶

OCAD’s willingness to hire skilled black men as plumbers²⁶⁷ and mechanics while refusing to hire black women as typists is the result of one of the inherent design flaws of the FEPC. Specifically, the FEPC it could only work to equalize employment opportunities, its founding documents did not allow it to challenge segregation at facilities. Evidence suggests that having overcome union obstacles, black men were hired as plumbers after establishing a segregated union as black carpenters had done throughout the state. Skilled black mechanics, as noted above had been employed relatively early at OCAD; at least summer of 1942. While a major win for black Oklahomans and the early FEPC, the men, evidenced by their complaints in 1943, were still denied promotions, pay raises, and better job assignments so OCAD could hire skilled black men and keep the facility as segregated as possible. This employment strategy allowed OCAD to comply with FEPC regulations and avoid any potential incidents surrounding actual integration at the same time. Plumbers and Mechanics made this possible as each

²⁶⁶ Freddye Williams, “I talked with Raymond H. Griffin,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, November 21, 1942.

²⁶⁷ Truman K. Gibson, Acting Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War to George M. Johnson, Assistant to the Chairman, President’s Committee on Fair Employment Practice, September 16, 1943; Cases Closed: Robert Young; Box 11 of 15; Non-Docketable Cases, 1943-1946, RG 228.

profession could be segregated by race into work “gangs.” These groups of skilled workers would then only work together on discrete tasks. The hiring of black typists threatened the racial tightrope OCAD so carefully walked. Typists worked in office settings, side-by-side with other professionals. Initially, OCAD had no way to segregate black typists after hiring them. As a consolation job, black women were directed to the position of “storekeeper” where they could be segregated at various locations throughout the complex. Before becoming a janitress and helping gain cafeteria access for black overnight workers, Laura Cato applied to become a mechanic. OCAD refused her request instead offered her a “storekeeper” position. Rather than taking a position she did not want, she opted to work as a janitress.²⁶⁸

In its November 21, 1942, edition, *the Black Dispatch* directly attacked OCAD over the facility’s refusal to hire black women as typists. The front page ran affidavits sworn by Freddye Williams and Christeria Coffey under the headlines “I talked with Raymond H. Griffin” and “I talked with Floyd E. Payne.”²⁶⁹ In another front-page article written by Albert White, a reporter at *the Black Dispatch*, that echoed and expanded upon the complaints of Coffey and Williams. White provided further explanation about how the FEPC worked and how the Oklahoma City NAACP planned to use the committee to advance rights and jobs. He accused OCAD of using “clever maneuvers” to keep from hiring African Americans certified by the United States Civil

²⁶⁸ “Official Complaint: Laura Cato,” Director Region IX FEPC, Roy A. Hogle, Region IX FEPC, November 19, 1942; Folder Cases Closed C: Laura Cato, Box 11 of 15; Region IX, 1943-1946, RG 228; OCAD Office “Memorandum in re: Oklahoma City Air Depot,” February 25, 1944; Cases Closed: Robert Young, Box 11 of 15; Region IX, 1943-1946, RG: 228 and “Negro Carpenters Unions Gets Charter,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, February 22, 1941.

²⁶⁹ Freddye Williams, “I talked with Raymond H. Griffin,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, November 21, 1942, and Christeria Coffey, “I talked with Floyd E. Payne,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, November 21, 1942.

Service Board. Despite the current reports of drastic shortages of typists and stenographers, no African American women certified by the Civil Service had been hired.²⁷⁰

White believed that given conditions in Oklahoma, the only way blacks could fully participate in the war effort was to appeal to the federal government. In Oklahoma City, White advised African Americans dealing with employment discrimination to file official FEPC complaints, and follow-up with the Lewis Clymer, the African American representative of the FEPC and War Manpower Commission for the region. In his article, white called for Clymer to personally journey to Oklahoma City and investigate ongoing employment discrimination against skilled black women. White felt the trip would demonstrate the importance of African Americans to the United States, force officials at OCAD and Douglas to hire skilled black labor and remind black Oklahoma Citians that the FEPC was their greatest ally on the home front.²⁷¹

After being interviewed by White for his “War Agencies Are Accused of Race Prejudice: Officials Refuse Jobs to Women” article, the secretary of the Oklahoma Civil Service Commission stressed that any discrimination in hiring practices did not originate with that office. White argued, however, that the answer could not be accurate as the design of the Civil Service and its process for recommending applicants created opportunities for employment discrimination even as it professed to favor using skilled black workers. Under the current system, women took Civil Service exams and then were ranked by score alone. When a personnel director such as Raymond H. Griffin asked for recommendations for typists, he would receive only a list of names and exam scores. At this point in the process, black and white

²⁷⁰ Albert White, “War Agencies Are Accused of Race Prejudice: Officials Refuse Jobs to Women,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, November 21, 1942.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

typists had an equal opportunity to be hired. From this point in the hiring process, however personnel directors had plenty of room to discriminate against skilled black women. When presented with a list of “eligibles,” managers like Griffin could hire anyone on the list, regardless of rank. To avoid hiring black women, applicants were required to report for an in person interview. After visually confirming an applicant’s race, hiring managers could hire white women on the spot, and tell black women there had been some mistake as documented by Freddie Williams. The final interview allowed personnel officers to base hiring decisions on race alone. On behalf of the *Dispatch*, White called for an end to the process of requiring interviews before employment placemen so that qualified black workers rather than the more “suitable” white ones would be employed.²⁷²

Dispatch reporter Albert White interviewed Floyd E. Payne, one of the hiring officials at OCAD who dealt with Freddie Williams and Christeria Coffey, via telephone. He asked Payne why he “refused to hire colored women who showed up at his office for an ‘interview’ as applicants for work.” White revealed that Freddie Williams worked as a reporter at the *Black Dispatch* and had been a plant working to document OCAD ongoing refusal to hire black typists. Payne claimed he had known this fact the entire time and explained that he did not hire Williams because he knew that she wanted to spread negative stories, not be a typist, a fact White did not believe. White followed up by asking if Payne had ever hired a black typist personally or if there had ever been a black typist anywhere at the facility. Payne said no, instead claiming that the “policy had always been not to hire African Americans,” but that it could change in the future. The personnel manager also denied knowledge of a pressing need

²⁷² Ibid.

for typists even though the civil service had begun giving more examinations to try and find enough typists to prevent work delays at OCAD and the city's largest white newspaper, *the Daily Oklahoman*, had reported on the shortage.²⁷³

Next, White approached Col. F. H. Henly, the highest-ranking army official in charge of personnel at OCAD, for a statement about the lack of black typists at the facility. Henley said the personnel office at OCAD followed all rules given them by the Civil Service. He further acknowledged that there no black women working in any department at OCAD. White pressed, "if a colored woman on the certified list showed up would she be hired?" Col. Henly replied he could not answer definitively because department heads could select their employees based on in person interviews. Raymond H. Griffin, a civilian personnel director, refused to comment on the affidavits of Freddye Williams and Christeria Coffey because he said he did not read that paper. He had no problem, however proclaiming he had not, and would not, hire black office employees. Regardless of denials and obfuscations, the fact remained that the local NAACP and black newspaper knew there were several black women qualified based on their scores on the Civil Service examination. They knew because they orchestrated the plan. The tests conducted by Williams and Coffey became the basis of formal complaints to the FEPC that were promoted relentlessly by the *Dispatch*.²⁷⁴

After filing her FEPC complaint over OCAD's refusal to hire black typists, Williams regularly updated Lewis Clymer, an African American representative of the FEPC and War Manpower Commission. Sources had recently told to Williams that Griffin had been telling

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

everyone in the personnel office that “his orders were not to hire Negroes,” even though he did not personally agree with this position. When Williams followed up these rumors, Griffin claimed his superiors imposed the position on him. He had no choice but to obey these orders as they “came to him from Washington, D.C.” Regardless, she told him, “passing the buck” was just another way to refuse to hire black workers. Griffin repeatedly stressed to her that he had no issues with hiring African American women but feared he would be fired for doing so. Williams, however, thought Griffin’s public claims of racial enlightenment were more about avoiding negative publicity at the hands of *the Black Dispatch* as the paper had been running articles calling out race and racism at area facilities for months.²⁷⁵

Clymer, who had been pressuring OCAD to hire skilled black men and women since early 1942, contacted Adjutant 1st Lt. B. H. Levy, the commandant, and highest ranking official, at the Depot to notify him of the situation as he viewed it from the FEPC’s perspective in October of 1942. He enclosed the letter from Williams noting she had “certain difficulties she experienced when called to fill a civil service job as a typist,” a violation of fair employment practices. As the representative for the region, Clymer informed OCAD officials an investigation had been opened. He highlighted a statement by Williams in her letter of complaint. When she took the Civil Service examination October 24, personnel official Floyd E. Payne bluntly stated “no colored persons were being used as typists,” at OCAD. Clymer remarked “it would appear from these facts that this young woman was needed, but not employed solely because she is

²⁷⁵ Freddye Williams to Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, October 31, 1942; Cases Closed W: Freddye Williams, Box 11 of 15; Region IX, 1943-1946; RG: 228.

[black].” He closed by asking to be informed if the situation could be satisfactorily handled and Mrs. Williams hired.²⁷⁶

Adjutant 1st Lt. B.H. Levy responded to Clymer on November 7, 1942. Levy’s letter is a textbook example of how facilities, even military ones, tried their best to avoid hiring black workers in any capacities they could. Adjutant Levy had personally interview. Floyd E. Pane about the accusation who admitted there was “a growing shortage of suitable applicants to fill vacant positions” and had been for at least four months. Regardless, Levy claimed it unimaginable OCAD would not hire everyone available as outlined in the Civil Service process. He then pointed out the facility’s hiring process was legal and pivoted to another discussion of “eligibles.” When the facility had openings, they contacted the Civil Service for a list of “eligibles.” Payne had reported to Levy that everyone on the list was called for an interview. Following this practice Williams, and all the other “eligibles” on the list were called to be interviewed. Levy explained that was why Williams received her first letter from the Secretary of the Civil Service office at OCAD. He disputed that the letter instructed her to have her fingerprints taken and have a physical examination. This could not have happened that way, according to Levy, as applicants were not supposed to be asked to get fingerprints taken until after the interview, he maintained. Levy felt the issue arose from a young lady in the office who had “certainly exceed[ed] her authority.”²⁷⁷

²⁷⁶ Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX to Commanding Officer, OCAD, November 2, 1942; Cases Closed W: Freddy Williams, Box 11 of 15; Cases Closed 1943-1945; RG: 228 and Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, to Freddy Williams, December 1, 1942; Cases Closed W: Freddy Williams, Box 11 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1946; RG: 228.

²⁷⁷ B. H. Levy 1st Lt., Air Corps Adjutant, Commanding Officer, OCAD to Office of Emergency Management, November 7, 1942; Cases Closed W: Freddy Williams, Box 11 of 15; Region IX, Cases Closed, 1943-1945; RG: 228.

Levy then presented Clymer a legal argument as to why racial discrimination did not occur in this situation. He noted that Section III, paragraph 8e, letter CPR-270-5 in the War Department Civilian Personnel Field Office, Eight Corps Area, Fort Sam Houston, Texas, stated an employee could be “selected from any place on the list of ‘eligibles.’” In effect, even an excellent test score and high a ranking from the Civil Service in no way guaranteed any one a position. The office could select an applicant “as soon as a suitable available applicant appear[ed] for an interview.” Apparently, Levy did not realize that this argument lent further credence to claims of arbitrary discrimination as discussed by Albert White’s reporting on the OCAD hiring process. Levy maintained that the last opening had filled just before Williams came into the office and that all his office staff knew there were no more jobs. Levy claimed personnel director Payne, out of sympathy for the effort shown by Williams, felt she at least should be “entitled to an interview with a view to possible future employment.” Based on the above, Levy thought it clear they were following all FEPC policies to the letter.²⁷⁸ One issue with Levy’s story is that Williams witnessed the white woman, who had shared the waiting room with her, secure employment as a typist *after* Williams had been told no openings remained. Furthermore, she had been strongly discouraged from waiting for Griffin’s return in what she saw as an obvious attempt to prevent her from seeing anyone else being hired as a typist.²⁷⁹

Clymer responds and agreed the rules of Civil Service appointments did in fact work the way Levy described. The FEPC, however, had the position that “these rules do not apply in all cases especially where no Negro workers are never employed at a given place.” Clymer closed

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Freddye Williams to Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, October 31, 1942; Cases Closed W: Freddye Williams, Box 11 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1946; RG: 228.

the case because there had technically not been a violation of FEPC policy based on Levy's explanation. The FEPC did not have the power to investigate anything but the clearest examples of employment discrimination. Clymer noted, however, that "a fair employment practice would reasonably indicate that some Negro person be employed as a typist at your base." Clymer applauded Levy's knowledge of the FEPC and expressed his certainty that since Levy proved to be so familiar with fair employment policies, he would personally ensure that OCAD soon hire more African Americans into skilled positions, especially as typists. He closed by promising to visit with Levy the next time he came to Oklahoma City to check on the progress of hiring black typists at OCAD.²⁸⁰

The efforts of Freddye Williams and Christeria Coffey to promote integration at OCAD did not immediately bear fruit. The NAACP and Dunjee stepped up their attacks in the *Black Dispatch*, no doubt aware of the success of the Tulsa branch and *the Oklahoma Eagle's* use of pressure. Dunjee had asked Williams and Christeria Coffey to swear an affidavit about their experiences trying to get war work. The affidavits ran on the front page of the *Dispatch* November 21, 1942. These two statements, and the efforts behind them, demonstrated the organization of the NAACP in Oklahoma and hinted at its calculated long-term plan, long-term plan. The efforts were coordinated. For example, both women applied at the same time, filed complaints the same day. and swore their affidavits the same day at the offices of the Black

²⁸⁰ B. H. Levy 1st Lt., Air Corps Adjutant, Commanding Officer, OCAD to Office of Emergency Management, November 7, 1942; Cases Closed W: Freddye Williams, Box 11 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1946; RG: 228.

Dispatch²⁸¹ As impressive as these efforts were, their successful resolution also depended on the FEPC as well.

In a weekly report to the War Manpower Commission written on December 10, 1942, Lewis Clymer noted improvement. Personnel officials had now determined black women could be hired at the depot as storekeepers for the same salary as typists. Any woman registered with the Civil Service as typists could apply for the storekeeper positions. Interestingly, Clymer noted that not all black women would be “acceptable.” OCAD officials often offered a salary to African Americans that exceeded their job titles when compelled to hire African Americans. Black employees’ salaries would be raised but their positions or titles would not change, or they would be one level below all whites in a department. This allowed the facility to try straddle the fence as they did with black mechanics. OCAD complied with FEPC dictates by hiring African Americans whom they hoped would not protest the lack of position or title provided they received the salary of a skilled worker. At the same time, the facility could remain segregated by ensuring all black workers worked together on similar tasks. Whereas black mechanics were used to clean engine parts instead of doing skilled mechanic work, black women qualified to be typists were steered toward “shopkeeper” positions.²⁸²

George M. Johnson, secretary of the FEPC in Washington, D.C., reported the outcome of all investigations regarding typists at OCAD on April 22, 1943. The FEPC and War Department interviewed everyone associated with the case that could be located. Unfortunately, Johnson

²⁸¹ Freddie Williams, “I talked with Raymond H. Griffin,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, November 21, 1942 and Christeria Coffey, “I talked with Floyd E. Payne,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, November 21, 1942.

²⁸² Lewis Clymer, “War Manpower Commission Weekly Report,” December 10, 1942; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

noted, no “specific information” could be “ascertained.” The officials at OCAD were not forthcoming with details but claimed Coffey had been on the “eligibles” list and officials contacted her for a position as an Under Clerk-Typist. A job she did not apply for or want. She declined saying she was currently employed at Katz Drug Store as a waitress/clerk and would only leave that job if she could be hired, classified, paid, and integrated as a typist. Officials blamed her unemployment on her. They claimed that she would not be without war work had she simply taken the position they offered. Williams, refused to accept any position other than typist/stenographer as well. Ever the journalist, she remained a reporter at the *Black Dispatch* instead.²⁸³

Although neither Williams nor Coffey secured a typist position, we know their efforts were not in vain. Truman K Gibson, acting Civilian Aid to the Secretary of War confirmed that 67 African American women worked in skilled positions that required office administration skills. There were six clerks and twenty-four junior clerks and two typists. Additionally, there were five storekeepers and thirty-two Junior Storekeepers. It is likely more women eventually held skilled roles like these as this the only report to present these numbers was produced in September 1943.²⁸⁴ OCAD continued to expand throughout the war. Skilled women made economic and employment gains at OCAD through the cooperation of the FEPC and the NAACP.

²⁸³ George M. Johnson, Assistant Secretary of FEPC, to Christeria Coffey, April 22, 1943; Cases Closed W: Freddie Williams, Box 11 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1946; RG: 228 and George M. Johnson, Assistant to the FEPC Chairman to Truman K. Gibson, Jr., Acting Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, July 10, 1943; Cases Closed W: Freddie Williams, Box 11 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1946; RG: 228.

²⁸⁴ Truman K. Gibson, Acting Civilian Aid to the Secretary of War to George M. Johnson, Assistant to the FEPC Chairman, September 16, 1943; Cases Closed W: Freddie Williams, Box 11 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1946; RG: 228.

Each skilled position represented a small concrete step toward workplace integration and the Classic Civil Rights Movement.

The FEPC, investigating several complaints of FECP violations at OCAD asked the facility for specific hiring statistics noting “the figure thus presented should indicate whether or not the [OCAD] has, in fact, carried out its personnel policies in accordance with the [FEPC] and various administration regulations issues by the War Department.” Requested data included number of black employees, the number of black employees in each job category, and the percentage of total employs who are African American. While the report shows African Americans in all “departments” they are not represented in all job “categories.” In September of 1943, there was a total of 1,339 African Americans working at the facility, or 9.2%. Of those jobs, 29 or 22.33% were skilled positions.²⁸⁵ African Americans were 9.4% of population of Oklahoma City and 7.6% of the population in the Oklahoma City labor market. Depending upon which statistics you are comparing, OCAD either just fell short of matching the percentage of skilled black workers with the percentage of blacks in the broader population, or they exceeded it.²⁸⁶

Further reporting proves the success of the FEPC and NAACP in the Oklahoma City area during the war years. A War Manpower Commission report from June 29, 1943, revealed improving job prospects for African Americans at OCAD. The report noted the facility had made

²⁸⁵ George M. Johnson, Assistant to the FEPC Chairman to Truman Gibson, Jr., Acting Civilian Aide to the Secretary of War, July 10, 1943; Cases Closed W: Freddy Williams, Box 11 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1946; RG: 228.

²⁸⁶ Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, “War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports,” November 4, 1942; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211 and U.S. Census Bureau, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940*, “Composition of the Population, by Counties: 1940,” 826; “Age, Race, and Sex, by Counties: 1940,” 824, 826, 827, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-volume-2/33973538v2p5ch8.pdf>, (accessed July 28, 2021).

the “greatest increase” of all defense facilities in the city. On March 1, 1943, African Americans made up 6.9% of the total workforce. By May 1, black workers made up 8.3% of the total. By September of 1943, the percentage had risen to 9.2%. Additionally, the “employment of nonwhites at essential firms” continued to grow throughout 1943. By January of 1944 only 27 applications submitted by African Americans remained open at the Oklahoma City USES office. These numbers demonstrate African Americans in Oklahoma City benefited from increasing job opportunities at OCAD throughout World War II with the greatest increase occurring from early 1942 to late 1943. The efforts of the FEPC and NAACP, though not magic, yielded tangible results. The number of job opportunities increased, as did skilled positions, and the facility as whole integrated cafeterias. These gains would have been unimaginable at the beginning of the war.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁷ “Labor Market Developments Report, for the Oklahoma City, Oklahoma Area,” June 29, 1943; Folder 533.052, Box 30, 1942-1945; RG 211; “Field Operations Report, Oklahoma City, Labor Area,” December 1945; Folder 533.052, Box 30, 1942-1945; RG 211 and “Labor Market Developments Report, for the Oklahoma City, Oklahoma Area,” May 12, 1943; Folder 533.052, Box 30, 1942-1945; RG 211.

The FEPC in smaller Oklahoma Cities

African Americans and their community organizations located outside of the urban centers of Tulsa and Oklahoma City also utilized the FEPC to secure work at defense facilities. The FEPC complaints examined here show the limits of the FEPC and some of the success it made a reality. Tulsa and Oklahoma City took advantage of defense facilities, a large engaged and organized African American population, and a local black newspaper to utilize the FEPC to secure jobs. In smaller cities, like McAlester, Muskogee, and Bartlesville, activists and job seekers did not have all of those resources with which to work. The absence of a local black newspaper and a large activist community were especially difficult to overcome. Additionally, these smaller communities did not have cadres of activists who could devote as much time, money, and energy to the campaigns.

In McAlester, Muskogee, and Bartlesville, conditions varied markedly from the large urban centers. The successes and failures in these cities all speak to how variable the situation could be from one locale to the next. Without the NAACP branch in each community had to tailor its approaches to securing defense jobs for African Americans. Black leaders in each of these cities organized through the NAACP and utilized the FEPC as a tool to further ongoing employment activism, with mixed results. McAlester benefited from a long history of black activism, a strong NAACP branch, and a new defense facility operated by the Navy. These factors, combined with a severe labor shortage in a low-population area – with a 12% African American population – meant black residents of McAlester were very likely to be hired into skilled production positions. Blacks in Muskogee benefited from similar circumstances including a high percentage of African Americans in Muskogee County, 24%. Black Muskogean were

hired into skilled positions at Camp Gruber but individual black applicants still faced employment discrimination at the local United States Employment Office (USES). Lastly, Bartlesville faced challenges that proved to be insurmountable. The local NAACP, FEPC, the War Manpower Commission, and national officials from the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelters Workers all worked together to keep the all-white local from blocking black workers at National Zinc. Unfortunately, they came up short.

McAlester

In McAlester, the FEPC worked, but in a different context from that in Oklahoma City and Tulsa. In the urban centers, FEPC successes were driven by an engaged black population with strong community organization and a militant black newspaper. McAlester had the first ingredients by not the second. With a long history of activism, however, the McAlester NAACP, a black carpenters local, and black citizens were able to pressure the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners and leverage the Naval Munitions Depot's desperate need for workers to place black carpenters during construction and over 1200 African Americans into integrated production operations, including large numbers of black women, by 1944.²⁸⁸

By 1942, when construction began on the Naval Munitions Depot, McAlester had a long history of industry and diverse workplaces and activism. In 1885, a Post Office opened officially marking McAlester as an Indian Territory town. James McAlester married into a Choctaw family to gain access tribal land and coal deposits. He was highly successful. As the coal industry grew, the city of McAlester became the center of a rail network designed to transport coal and

²⁸⁸ E. R. Ormsbee, FEPC Investigator, Region IX, "Amendment to Final Disposition Report, Naval Ammunition Depot, McAlester, Oklahoma," December 11, 1944; Naval Ammunition Depot, McAlester, Oklahoma, Bertha Lee Brown, Box 10 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945; RG 228.

cotton, the local cash crop, to market as quickly as possible. The booming coal industry resulted in an incredibly diverse workforce; black, white, Native American, and foreign.²⁸⁹ The NAACP branch in McAlester was among the most militant in the state. So much so that the local black high school was named to honor Haitian revolutionary Toussaint Louverture. Black militancy in the area traces back to the ending of slavery within the Choctaw Nation, the only of the Oklahoma tribes to exclusively side with the Confederate States of America during the Civil War. The nation also refused to incorporate their slaves into the Choctaw Nation as Freedmen and full citizens in violation of Reconstruction treaties of 1865 and 1866. When that happened, former Choctaw slaves organized a delegation to Washington, D.C. where they mobilized the federal government on their behalf and received a solution. In the 1880s, black Choctaw citizens returned to the capitol as part of a group intent on creating an all-black state. Although the all-black state never materialized, Choctaw freedmen organized all-black towns throughout southeastern Oklahoma. These experiences ingrained militancy, and early support statist solutions in McAlester and throughout Choctaw nation even before statehood.²⁹⁰

By the 1940s, the McAlester branch of the NAACP was one of the most militant in the Oklahoma State Conference of Branches, which was in turn the most militant state conference in the nation. The region's NAACP strength came from the legacy of all-black towns started by

²⁸⁹ Thurman Shuller, "McAlester," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=MC001> (accessed July 31, 2021); Steven L. Sewell, "Coal," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*; <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=CO001> (accessed July 31, 2021) and Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma: "Economic and Demographic Data" <https://www.odot.org/OK-GOV-DOCS/PROGRAMS-AND-PROJECTS/GRANTS/FASTLANE-US69/Reports-Tech-Info/Tribal%20Data.pdf> (accessed July 31, 2021).

²⁹⁰ Arthur L Tolson, *The Black Oklahomans: A History, 1541-1972* (New Orleans: Edwards Printing Company, 1974,) 41-45; Billy Joan English and Sharon Calhoun, *Oklahoma Heritage* (Oklahoma City: ACP, Inc., 1995), 125; Franklin, *The Blacks in Oklahoma*, 45 and Johnson, *Acres of Aspiration*, 9-10, 26-31, 63-64, 72-73.

Choctaw Freedmen that later translated into NAACP branches. The Southeastern region had the highest number of branches of all regions in the state conference and prided itself on integrating the NAACP as much as possible. The McAlester NAACP branch hosted several important annual conventions including, but not limited to, the Oklahoma Association of Negro Teachers (OANT), the Oklahoma Federation of Colored Women, and the State Conference of Branches.²⁹¹

McAlester struggled during the Great Depression as coal and cotton markets bottomed-out. City leaders sought to lure federal facilities throughout the 1930s. Gould Bryan, leader of the McAlester Chamber of Commerce called together other local white leaders, leaders, U.S. Senator Elmer Thomas, and U.S. Representative Wilburn Cartwright to act as delegates on the city's behalf in Washington, D.C. McAlester, according to the delegates, had several factors that made the location ideal for a defense facility. The area had abundant cheap land, was inland enough to make enemy bombing runs impossible, and the center of a rail and highway transportation network. When the Navy made the official announcement on June 10, 1942, Gould Bryan and the Chamber of Commerce immediately began to purchase 30,000 acres for the enormous \$45,000,000 facility. The Munitions Depot produced everything from 16-inch gun ammunition, rockets, mines, and depth charges during the war. The first munitions rolled out in September of 1943.²⁹²

²⁹¹ "Oklahoma Federation of Colored Women to Meet in McAlester for Annual Parley," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, August 31, 1940; "Enid Snatches 1943 Session of the Oklahoma Conference of Branches from McAlester," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, October 20, 1945; "Many Noted Figures to Attend McAlester Parley Nov. 1-2," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, October 27, 1945 and Derrick James, "Rev. Wade Watts: A Lasting Legacy," *McAlester News*, February 27, 2021, https://www.mcalesternews.com/news/rev-wade-watts-a-lasting-legacy/article_07cca0ea-7912-11eb-bb23-ebe5f880a829.html (accessed July 31, 2021).

²⁹² "McAlester Will Get New Munition Plant," *The Daily Oklahoman*, June 11, 1942. "Six Counties Get Rent Slash Order," *the Daily Oklahoman*, July 30, 1942 and "Workers Get 'E' For Speed At Naval Depot," *The Daily Oklahoman*,

Like in Oklahoma City and Tulsa, fights over construction jobs preceded efforts to secure production employment for local African Americans. The McAlester NAACP planned to make sure skilled black carpenters and masons were hired during the construction phase of the facility. The building contractor, Bellows and Brown, needed 15,000 construction workers, a huge number of jobs considering the population of McAlester was only 12,401 in 1940, with African Americans making up 10% of that number. Surrounding communities, including all-black towns, had even higher percentages of African American second generation European workers. The history of diversity and integrated workspaces in the McAlester area, coupled with the severe labor shortage set the stage for African American job opportunities.²⁹³ By December of 1944, the FEPC reported the Depot employed large numbers of African Americans “in all categories for which they qualif[ied] and that no discrimination” existed in the Naval Depot’s employment policies.²⁹⁴

June 6, 1943. “McAlester Army Munition Plant: Written Historical and Descriptive Data,” *National Park Service: Historic American Engineering Record*, 1985 (17); Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma: Economic and Demographic Data; Thurman Shuller, “McAlester,” *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=MC001>(accessed July 31, 2021); Steven L. Sewell, “Coal,” *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=CO001> (accessed July 31, 2021); Matthew Rex Cox, “U.S. Naval Ammunition Depot,” *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=US002> (accessed July 31, 2021) and Robert C. Mack and David A. Fey , “McAlester Army Munition Plant: Written Historical and Descriptive Data,” *National Park Service: Historic American Engineering Record*, 1985 - <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/master/pnp/habshaer/ok/ok0000/ok0041/data/ok0041data.pdf> (accessed July 31, 2021).

²⁹³ U.S. Census Bureau, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940*, “Composition of the Population, by Counties: 1940,” 827. <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-volume-2/33973538v2p5ch8.pdf>, (accessed July 28, 2021) and Thurman Shuller, “McAlester,” *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture* and Steven L. Sewell, “Coal,” *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=CO001> (accessed July 31, 2021).

²⁹⁴ E. R. Ormsbee, FEPC investigator, Region IX, to file, “Amendment to Final Disposition Report, Region IX, Naval Ammunition Depot, McAlester, Oklahoma,” December 11, 1944; Naval Ammunition Depot, McAlester, Oklahoma, Bertha Lee Brown, Box 10 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945; RG 228.

Construction

The Naval Munitions Depot at McAlester was so huge that it taxed the labor supply of the region. By June 6, 1943, four days short of a year from the start of construction, contractors had construction 1,939 buildings, 217 miles of roads, and 115 miles of railroad track. With the massive scale of the facility, and its rural environs. As with all other new defense facilities in Oklahoma, there exists no evidence of FEPC violations concerning black unskilled workers during the construction process. The labor shortage in McAlester is responsible for employment gains by African Americans in unskilled jobs, but the same cannot be said of skilled workers. Even though the munitions depot had been constructed in under a year, its opening had been delayed due to a shortage of skilled laborers, especially carpenters and masons. Local whites, who controlled who worked in what positions, endeavored to keep skilled black workers from the depot construction site.²⁹⁵

As usual on Oklahoma defense projects, the local United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners union led that fight to monopolize high-paying skilled positions for whites. R. M. Jones, Jr., business agent for the all-black local 2341 of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners in Muskogee, telegrammed Ed McDonald, the regional director of the War Manpower Commission in Kansas City, on December 9, 1942, to notify him of discriminatory hiring practices occurring at the munitions depot in McAlester. Local 2341 was the closest black local for carpenters in the McAlester area. Fifty black carpenters, members of local 2341, had been

²⁹⁵ "Six Counties Get Rent Slash Order," *The Daily Oklahoman*, July 30, 1942; "Workers Get 'E' for Speed At Naval Depot," *The Daily Oklahoman*, June 6, 1943 and "McAlester Army Munition Plant: Written Historical and Descriptive Data," (National Park Service: Historian American Engineering Record, 1985), 17, ok0041data.pdf (loc.gov) (accessed July 31, 2021).

unable to secure work at the McAlester depot. The project needed carpenters to avoid further construction delays. Bellows and Brown, the company handling construction, expressed willingness to hire African American workers if they were union approved. The agent for the white local of the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners in McAlester did not share the enthusiasm of Bellows and Brown. He refused to allow the members of the black local in Muskogee to be “passed through” his McAlester local.²⁹⁶

The local agent for McAlester’s white carpenters – whose name does not survive – offered a disingenuous explanation of his rejection of the Black carpenters. He agreed to recognize the union cards of the black Muskogee carpenters and recommend them for jobs at the Naval Depot through his local. He would not, however, do this until every one of his white carpenters were placed in jobs. Unfortunately, he noted, there were currently 1500 white members of his local on the waiting list and only 500 carpenters were needed for the job. Given Bellow and Brown’s ongoing concerns about shortages of skilled workers, the number of waiting white carpenters was likely inflated.²⁹⁷

Lewis Clymer, minorities placement specialist for the regional War Manpower Commission, did not buy the white local’s explanation. Jones and another representative from Local 2341, Thomas Wright, traveled to Kansas City to meet with Clymer. The meeting

²⁹⁶ R.M. Jones, Business Agent Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, Local 2341 to Ed McDonald, Regional Director, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, December 9, 1942; Naval Ammunition Depot, McAlester, Oklahoma, R.M. Jones, Box 10 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945; RG 228; R.M. Jones, Business Agent Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, Local 2341 to Ed McDonald, Regional Director, Region IX, War Manpower Commission, December 16, 1942; Naval Ammunition Depot, McAlester, Oklahoma, R.M. Jones, Box 10 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945; RG 228; and Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, “Field Report,” December 12, 1942; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

²⁹⁷ Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, “Field Report,” December 12, 1942; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

happened on December 12, 1942. After the meeting, Clymer reported that the black local had “followed accepted procedure in that they have made an effort to work out this situation with the officer of the white locals having jurisdiction over this job.” Jones and Wright had already met with J. Q. Maloney, special agent for the carpenters union in Tulsa, and A. C. Leelen, business agent of the white local in Muskogee. Getting nowhere, the Muskogee delegation then reached out to Mr. McCullough, the project manager for the Depot. He confirmed that neither Bellows and Brown or the United States Navy had any objections to employing blacks, provided they were referred by the McAlester local. Further, Clymer opined, “they are only asking for a proportional representation of the 93 men of their local.” Which is understandable considering that the white carpenter’s local in Muskogee had no issues in getting their union members passed through the McAlester local.²⁹⁸

R. M. Jones, Jr, of the black carpenters local in Muskogee, and black NAACP leaders in McAlester knew the rapid pace of construction planned for the facility meant they had to act quickly and decisively. Within two weeks of Local 2341’s original complaint to the War Manpower Commission’s Kansas City office, the black local from Muskogee met with union leaders in McAlester, Muskogee, Tulsa, and Kansas City. The haste of these efforts reflects one of the biggest lessons learned during the earliest struggles with union locals in late 1941/early 1942: without intervention from above, and sometimes not even then, local union officials could keep Oklahoma defense industries whites only and they would drag out the process

²⁹⁸ Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, “Field Report,” December 12, 1942; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211 and Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX to R.M. Jones, Business Agent Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, Local 2341, December 19, 1942; Naval Ammunition Depot, McAlester, Oklahoma, R.M. Jones, Box 10 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945; RG 228.

however they could. With that in mind, Jones and Wright acted to elevate their concerns to the highest levels possible as quickly as possible.²⁹⁹

After contacting E. E. Warren, the union organizer from Tulsa, Paul V. McNutt, chairman of the WMC, and Congressional Representative Jack Nichols, Jones and Wright traveled to the International Carpenter's Union headquarters in Indianapolis. On December 16, 1942, they wrote to update Ed McDonald, regional head of the WMC, about out the Indiana meeting. It was successful. "Upon the orders of the National Office" the McAlester local would allow members of the black local to "pass through . . . whereby the Negro Carpenters might secure employment on the United States Naval Munition Depot."³⁰⁰

Just as one obstacle was overcome R.M. Jones reported, "we now have another problem." The agent in McAlester, after receiving orders to employ thirty African American carpenters, again met with the project manager for the Naval Depot. Following that meeting, the unnamed manager informed Mr. Jones that "it is impossible to work out a plan where-by" black carpenters can be employed "because all Carpenters will have to work together; meaning Negro and White." Again, the local union and sympathetic employers had quickly adapted their approach to blocking black employment. Unable to continue to resist the directives of their national leaders, they convinced the project manager to change his stance over fears that white

²⁹⁹ R.M. Jones, Business Agent Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, Local 2341 to Ed McDonald, Regional Director, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, December 9, 1942; Naval Ammunition Depot, McAlester, Oklahoma, R.M. Jones, Box 10 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945; RG 228; R.M. Jones, Business Agent Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, Local 2341 to Ed McDonald, Regional Director, Region IX, War Manpower Commission, December 16, 1942; Naval Ammunition Depot, McAlester, Oklahoma, R.M. Jones, Box 10 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945; RG 228 and Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, "Field Report," December 12, 1942; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

³⁰⁰ Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, "Field Report," December 12, 1942; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

carpenters, and therefore union members, would walk off the job rather than work alongside blacks. On December 21, 1942, twelve days after the Muskogee black local reached out for assistance, McAlester hosted a conference that included union representatives from the black local in Muskogee and the white local in McAlester, the project manager, and a representative of the War Manpower Commission. The solution, in the end, let 30 black carpenters from Muskogee “pass through” the McAlester local to work on a segregated carpenter gang at the Depot.³⁰¹

Although the union had sought to place 93 carpenters and only succeeded in placing 30 the accomplishment was impressive. After the United Brotherhood of Carpenters Union agreed to stop blocking black carpenters there were no further complaints against unions in McAlester whatsoever. The Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners had been defeated again in Oklahoma, and faster than ever. Based on earlier fights with the Brotherhood, the actions by R. M. Jones of the black local in Muskogee were swifter, shrewder, and larger in scope than earlier efforts with Douglas Aircraft in Tulsa and DuPont ordinance works in Chouteau. The rapid action is evidence of the interconnectedness and communication of the State Conference of Branches and black union members in Oklahoma. Jones in Muskogee, armed with the experiences of Tulsa and Oklahoma City, knew the brotherhood would try to avoid hiring black carpenters until construction was completed. Additionally, the complaint resolution is evidence of the success in Tulsa and Oklahoma City echoing in smaller cities throughout the state.³⁰²

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² R.M. Jones, Business Agent Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, Local 2341 to Ed McDonald, Regional Director, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, December 9, 1942; Naval Ammunition Depot, McAlester, Oklahoma, R.M. Jones, Box 10 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945; RG 228 and R.M. Jones, Business Agent Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, Local 2341 to Ed McDonald, Regional Director, War Manpower

Integration at the Depot

Evidence of the success of the FEPC and McAlester NAACP in securing jobs for black workers at the Munitions Depot – skilled and unskilled – is revealed in the three FEPC complaints filed against the facility. Taken together the complaints paint a picture of skilled black carpenters being hired to work during the construction phase and after opening, an integrated facility where skilled black workers stood side-by-side with whites on production lines and the only groups of people being segregated against were racist whites in a few whites only buildings. Furthermore, public transportation between McAlester and the facility was also integrated. McAlester’s militant black population overcame the absence of a local black newspaper aided by a massive need for labor. Of course, as the primary message of the complaints shows, the FEPC could not work miracles. Racist whites still held sway in parts of the facility and racial antagonism still occurred, but real progress continued.

The joint complaint of Eva Mae Gentry and Marva June Bryson underscores the abilities and limitations of the FEPC. It could achieve widespread employment opportunities for African Americans but could not eliminate Jim Crow. Gentry and Bryson worked at the Naval Ammunition Depot, boarded a McAlester city bus at the end of their production shift on July 7, 1944. The women watched as a black man boarded and sat in an open seat beside a Native American man.³⁰³ Capt. Woodside, United States Navy Commandant of the facility, conducted an

Commission, Region IX, December 16, 1942; Naval Ammunition Depot, McAlester, Oklahoma, R.M. Jones, Box 10 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945; RG 228.

³⁰³ Marva June Bryson and Eva Mae Gentry, “FEPC Complaint,” September 7, 1944; Naval Ammunition Depot, McAlester, Oklahoma, Bertha Lee Brown, Box 10 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945; RG 228; E. R. Ormsbee to File, “Addendum,” September 11, 1944; Naval Ammunition Depot, McAlester, Oklahoma, Bertha Lee Brown, Box 10 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945; RG 228 and Roy A. Hoglund, Regional Director FEPC, Region IX to Will Maslow, Director FEPC Field Operations, September 29, 1944; Naval Ammunition Depot, McAlester, Oklahoma, Bertha Lee Brown, Box 10 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945; RG 228.

investigation at the request of the FEPC and claimed the ensuing altercation was merely a misunderstanding that the complainants took out of context.³⁰⁴

A white man boarded the bus first on July 7, 1944 and wanted to pay for his fare with a bill. The driver had no change and asked him to sit down until everyone else had boarded, then he would be given change. Capt. Woodside maintained the white man then sat down beside a Native American man. After everyone boarded, the driver called the white man to the front for his change. A black man took the now open seat even though the Native American told him it was taken. The black man refused to move. The driver reported to Woodside that, at this point, there occurred an "altercation." The driver personally asked the man to move, but he refused again. The driver then offered him a transfer if he would prefer to wait for the next bus. He, instead, asked for and received a refund. The black man still refused to move or leave the bus. Aided by three white volunteers, the driver began to drag the unnamed black man off the bus. As the commandant described it, Bryson and Gentry then viscously set upon the white men dragging the man "drawing considerable blood from the elbow of the shoe heel upon the forehead of one of [the men] and knife cuts to the other." Gentry and Bryson called the incident a "race fight" against a black man they feared would be killed for not moving to another bus seat. They acknowledged they had attacked the white men removing the black man from the bus. When Naval security arrived the ranking officer immediately took the women's work badges and fired them.³⁰⁵

³⁰⁴ Marva June Bryson and Eva Mae Gentry, "FEPC Complaint," September 7, 1944; Naval Ammunition Depot, McAlester, Oklahoma, Bertha Lee Brown, Box 10 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945; RG 228.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

They were not allowed to explain the situation, nor were they interviewed. Furthermore, they were the only people disciplined by the facility because of the incident. There had recently been a petition circulated at the plant to have the women re-hired. It failed. The FEPC examiner, Ms. Ormsee, after an investigation, dismissed the complaint on merits. Eugene Davidson, Assistant Director of Field Operations for the FEPC, asked Roy A. Hoglund to review the report because he felt there had not been enough follow-up with the women. He wanted to know why. Ormsby explained she believed the evidence to be so compelling, and the commanding officer's reasoning -- "violent people were dangerous, and a defense munition plant was already dangerous enough" -- so sound, she did not follow-up with the women.³⁰⁶

In addition to demonstrating militancy among African American women in McAlester, the complaint also reveals details about the Naval Munitions Depot and African American employment during the war years. Clearly the facility was hiring both African American women and men as evidenced by the complainants and the man they tried to defend on the bus. Based on the complaint of the women, the bus was empty when it arrived at the end of a production shift at the depot and that the bus was not segregated based on race. Blacks, whites, and Native Americans all took the same bus. The unnamed African American man is described as sitting down in an open seat previously occupied by a white male, therefore, the bus service was not segregated by race. The fact that only the women were fired after the altercation but not the unnamed black male further shows African Americans were not uniformly viewed as undesirable employees. Had the facility developed a practice of avoiding the employment of African Americans the situation on the bus provided an excellent opportunity to be rid of the

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

unnamed black man as well. The complaint of Bryson and Gentry does not reveal anything about the existence of skilled black workers past those hired as carpenters during construction.³⁰⁷

Skilled Production Work

With construction completed, Brow and Bellow's oversight transitioned to naval personnel. As with OCAD, the federally operated facility hired large numbers of African Americans especially in comparison to civilian-managed facilities like Douglas Aircraft and Spartan Aircraft Company. Quite simply, evidence proves federal operations were more likely to hire African Americans for war work in skilled and unskilled capacities. After operations began, no FEPC complaint alleging the facility refuse to hire African Americans for any positions were filed whatsoever. Of the three complaints filed, all complaints were black women and all alleged improper dismissal due to race. The complaints provide further insight into the success of African Americans in finding skilled production positions and integrating workplaces, whether they were later fired or not.

The complaint of Bertha Lee Brown sheds further light on the status of skilled workers at the facility. Like those of Bryson and Gentry, Brown's complaint is more important for the peripheral information it provides than the complaint itself. By reading the complaint against the grain in which it was written, a story of the FEPC producing tangible results for skilled black workers can be told. Most importantly, Bertha Lee Brown, and many other black women were skilled production workers at the Naval Munitions Depot, and they worked in integrated

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

production areas, both huge victories for African American workers in McAlester and the FEPC.³⁰⁸

Brown, in September of 1944, worked on an integrated production line in Building 100. Late that month she and her fellow workers – white and black women – finished the day’s work early. She and other black women from Building 100 were told to report to Building 103 to assist with production work for the remainder of the shift. The other women from Building 100 were divided among other production buildings.³⁰⁹ Building 103 was a segregated “whites only” detail. When black women from the integrated Building 100 arrived, the white workers refused to work alongside them on the production line, even for a portion of a shift. Supervisors conceded to the whites’ demands and assigned the black women to do what Brown called “men’s heavy janitorial work” instead of their usual, skilled, production tasks. Brown believed this to be undisputable evidence of racial discrimination. Furthermore, Brown experienced further, more personal, discrimination during her work in Building 103. She had visited the Depot doctor earlier in the week and had a note saying she could not be assigned this type of work. Brown showed the statement to the white supervisor. He took it from her, tore it up, and told her to do the janitorial work or get out. She refused. He fired her.³¹⁰

As in the situation with Brown and Gentry, Captain Woodside, the facility commandant, conducted his own investigation. He, Commander Hood, and Lt. Vaughn issued a joint

³⁰⁸ Bertha Lee Brown, “FEPC Complaint,” September 5, 1944; Naval Ammunition Depot, McAlester, Oklahoma, Bertha Lee Brown, Box 10 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945; RG 228 and Roy A Hoglund, Regional FEPC Director, Region IX, to Will Maslow, FEPC Director of Field Operations, September 30, 1944; Naval Ammunition Depot, McAlester, Oklahoma, Bertha Lee Brown, Box 10 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945; RG 228.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Bertha Lee Brown, “FEPC Complaint,” September 5, 1944; Naval Ammunition Depot, McAlester, Oklahoma, Bertha Lee Brown, Box 10 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945; RG 228

statement on the findings. Brown worked in Commander Hood's department and Lt. Vaughn was in immediate charge of both Buildings. All acknowledged work in Building 100 stopped before the full workday ended and that then "the workers, both white and colored, had been scattered among several other buildings to complete their time in accordance with usual practice."³¹¹

Lt. Vaughn claimed Brown and "four other colored girls" refused to "do the work assigned them" and, instead, they then walked throughout Building 103 talking to all the black women "apparently to get them to stop work with them." Brown said they only told the other women they were leaving for the day. According to Vaughn, however, the women began to sing and clap loudly "We don't have to do mopping, etc." He took the women outside and fired all of them for insubordination. The other women fired that day did not file FEPC complaints alleging improper dismissal. Vaughn further claimed Brown "had been involved in minor disturbances" at the facility for some time," a clear reference to the ongoing militancy of black women in McAlester.³¹²

Brown maintained she was not fired for any "incidents" but because she had the temerity to stick-up for herself. She had recently been injured and her doctor had released her to do light work only. Vaughn told her he thought her note was forged and that he did not understand "why blacks come to work at the facility if they cannot do men's work." He felt black workers, regardless of skill level or position, should expect to be treated as common laborers. Proof local officials could still disrupt FEPC practices if they chose to do so. Like with

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Ibid.

the case of Gentry and Bryson, FEPC examiner Ormsby found in favor of the McAlester facility and dismissed the complaint on merits.³¹³

Brown did not get the result for which she hoped, but her story offers a fascinating glimpse at how the FEPC landed blows on Jim Crow. The story related by Brown, proves the FEPC, and integration, was winning the day in McAlester. Remember, Brown left her *integrated* work building to go with other black women to a “segregated” white space. Ergo, the munitions depot had gone from refusing to hire black carpenters to dealing with racial violence at the gates of the facility, but it was white segregationists who were segregated by 1944. Large numbers of African American women were employed on a skilled, integrated production line. This means progressive blacks and whites were not fighting integration efforts. The problem lay with an increasingly small number of ardent segregationists among workers. This also demonstrates that the Munitions Depot’s greatest concern remained racist white workers. Last, the stories of the bus incident revealed that city busses were not segregated in McAlester. The issue with the black man who precipitated the incident was that he sat in an occupied seat, not that he sat in a white only area.

The clearest evidence of skilled black employment at the McAlester depot is the simplest. After the complaints of the black carpenters there are no other FEPC complaints that dealt with refusal to hire African Americans in skilled or unskilled capacities at the Depot. Had there been continued resistance to hiring black workers, the local NAACP branch – an active part of Oklahoma’s militant State Conference of Branches – would have orchestrated further complaints. They did not. Furthermore, the complaints of the black women argued improper

³¹³ Ibid.

dismissal, not refusal to hire. As unfair as the firings may have been, the fact that the complaints revealed a facility employing large numbers of black women in skilled positions is a major FEPC success story. Although employment reports do not show the number of African American skilled workers, there were 1200 African American workers at the munitions depot, or 19% of the total workforce, as of September 7, 1944.³¹⁴

Muskogee

The city of Muskogee had a higher percentage of black residents than Oklahoma City, Tulsa or any of the other communities with defense facilities. In Muskogee County, African Americans made up 24% of the population. The city and its surrounding environs did not attract any new defense factories during the war years, but Camp Gruber, a military training facility, expanded and opened 4000 jobs to civilians. Like in McAlester, a high number of job openings, and the fact that the hiring was done by military officers yielded results. Records indicating total number of black employees and what positions they worked in do not survive. But reading FEPC against the grain indicates that a significant number of African Americans were employed in both skilled and unskilled positions at Camp Gruber.

Muskogee, incorporated on March 19, 1898, fifty miles southeast of Tulsa, began as a station for the Katy railroad as it entered and exited the Choctaw Nation loaded with Coal and Cotton. The city was an early magnet for African Americans. Second Street became an African American business hub and boasted oil companies along with restaurants and merchants. Until the 1910s the city boasted a prominent African American newspaper, the *Muskogee Cemiter*,

³¹⁴ E. R. Ormsbee to File, "Amendment to Final Disposition Report, Region IX, Naval Ammunition Depot, McAlester, Oklahoma," December 11, 1944; Naval Ammunition Depot, McAlester, Oklahoma, Bertha Lee Brown, Box 10 of 15; Cases Closed, 1943-1945; RG 228.

published by A. J. Smitherman. After he relocated to Tulsa in 1914, the city fell under the coverage of *the Oklahoma Eagle* in Tulsa. In 1940, Muskogee County was 24% African American. Unsurprisingly, the local NAACP branch was continually active. The branch hosted the annual Conference of the National Negro Business League, organized several events for the State Conference of Branches, and brought legal challenges against educational discrimination to the federal court system, all during the war years.³¹⁵

Muskogee did not have any defense factories during World War II, only military installations. In 1921 the Army built Hatbox Field as a combination municipal airport and U.S. Army Air Corps facility. During World War II, the facility hosted pilot training courses. The other employer added for World War II was Camp Gruber. Built as a training area for the Army's Eighth Service Command, the 109 square mile facility employed 4,000 civilians, many of them African Americans. Furthermore, Muskogee was located between defense facilities at Tulsa, Chouteau, and McAlester. All the of the neighboring facilities were accessible by rail from Muskogee and, as a result, black residents had a large number of skilled employment opportunities in war years.

Like in McAlester, the FEPC complaints were not about getting African Americans hired but rather combatting racial discrimination among employees. The two complaints examined from Muskogee provide insight into limitations of the FEPC's abilities and lack of successful resolutions for FEPC complainants who did not understand how to properly file complaints or

³¹⁵ Wallace F. Waits, Jr., "Muskogee," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=MU018> (accessed July 31, 2021) and U.S. Census Bureau, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940*, "Race and Age, by Sex, with Rural-Farm Population, for Minor Civil Divisions, by Counties: 1940," 898. <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-volume-2/33973538v2p5ch8.pdf> (accessed July 31, 2021).

work with the NAACP, or another community group like black carpenters local. Without the knowledge to navigate the FEPC bureaucracy many complainants failed to get any resolution whatsoever.

The first FEPC complaint filed from Muskogee reveals the importance of African American organizations. It deals with an African American man who was unable to find defense work in the area and did not understand how to utilize the FEPC. His case reveals the challenges faced by black job seekers in if they fell throughout the cracks of community efforts to educate black workers about the FEPC. In Muskogee, without a black newspaper and fulltime activists, the NAACP could not reach everyone. Local black activists made the FEPC work.³¹⁶

The complaints of Eddie Anderson from Muskogee demonstrate some of the problems with how the agency received complaints, tracked them, and followed-up with them. In October of 1942, Anderson wrote to President Roosevelt for help in getting defense industry work in Oklahoma.

Mr. Roosevelt Sir, here is just what I believe. This is my country, and it is my duty to stand by her in peace as well as war. So, therefore this war is my war just as same as [it is] my white friend's war. By this being my war, I want to help win by sending out [machines] that go out and get the job done. So, if you will, can you please tell me what shop or factory I can do to help the most as a mechanic, welder, a machine operator.³¹⁷ In his letter, eventually forwarded to the FEPC, Anderson detailed his qualifications and

explained he still struggled to find defense employment. Anderson had training and experience that should have allowed him to work as a mechanic, welder, auto body worker, or in engine

³¹⁶ Dianna Everett, "Camp Gruber," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=CA022> (accessed July 31, 2021).

³¹⁷ Eddie Anderson To President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, October 5, 1941; Cases Closed Unions, Box 14 of 15; Closed Cases, 1943-1945; 228 and George N. Johnson, Assistant Executive FEPC Secretary, to Mr. Eddie Anderson, October 22, 1942; Cases Closed Unions, Box 14 of 15; Closed Cases, 1943-1945; 228.

repair. The only thing standing in his way is that “a colored man . . . [could not] get a job.”

Although he considered joining the army, he felt his experiences made him more valuable in defense work, especially aircraft production. He had already worked on several defense production construction projects – Douglas Aircraft in Tulsa, a shell loading plant in Parsons, Kansas, as a general laborer during the expansion of Camp Gruber, and as a skilled worker at an aircraft production facility in Wichita, Kansas.³¹⁸

In October 1942, he sought a skilled job that better suited his skilled abilities and paid more. His letter, written without an understanding of the FEPC or the assistance of a community organization, did not include crucial details about his specific experience. He did not explain where he applied, or to whom he spoke. He apologized for asking Roosevelt for help but felt his efforts had failed due to the opposition of local officials, usually union ones. Luckily, one of his supervisors during a construction project offered to help him get a union card so he could be hired as a skilled mechanic. Thrilled, Anderson went to pick up his union card from a local union official he did not name in his letter. When he arrived, however, he did not receive a union card or job. Rather, the unnamed official told him “this is no damn [blacks] war, and so we don’t want any [blacks] in the union.” What, Anderson asked Roosevelt, should he do now to help win the war effort when unions were willing to lose the war if it meant keeping lily-white workspaces?³¹⁹

Because the FEPC’s design required it wait for complaints to be filed before investigating, the agency could not try to help Anderson until his letters to Roosevelt were

³¹⁸ Ibid

³¹⁹ Ibid

forwarded to the FEPC by the White House. Since Anderson did not file his complaint with the assistance of black community organizations or solid working knowledge of the FEPC, his complaint went to the wrong place and was incomplete. As a result, Anderson's first contact from the committee was a request for more information. The committee could offer no assistance until he responded with the date the event happened, the name of the individual who denied him union admission based on race, and that person's official title. Without the relevant details, the FEPC, no matter how willing to investigate, were placed in an impossible position. They could now investigate but had no idea whom should be investigated. As happened far too often with complainants asked to provide additional information to the FEPC, Anderson did not respond with more information. The FEPC, therefore, could never investigate.³²⁰

Anderson's story picks up again under his legal name, James B. Anderson. He wrote to Roosevelt to follow-up on his earlier letter. He still did not have a skilled job as he could not secure appropriate training. His experience in carpentry and electric wiring did not get him into a skilled training course, even though that is the opportunity he sought. Instead, officials in Muskogee enrolled him in a training course for common laborers. As Anderson put it, "in most cases colored men cannot get nothing but common labor especially here and yet we are to help with the war. I believe that a man should have work according to his training and not race."³²¹

The FEPC, for good reason, did not realize Eddie and James B. were the same Anderson. So, they responded telling him that he needed to submit more information for an investigation

³²⁰ George N. Johnson, Assistant Executive FEPC Secretary, to Mr. Eddie Anderson, October 22, 1942; Cases Closed Unions, Box 14 of 15; Closed Cases, 1943-1945; RG 228.

³²¹ George M. Johnson, Assistant Executive FEPC Secretary to James B. Anderson, August 4, 1942; Cases Closed Unions, Box 14 of 15; Closed Cases, 1943-1945; 228.

to occur.³²² Anderson replied but, again, sent his letter to President Roosevelt. His frustrated tone suggests he believed the FEPC and Roosevelt to be essentially the same entity. In response to the request for more information, he pointedly listed his qualifications. Again, the White House forwarded the letter to the FEPC who wrote to Anderson to say they needed more information.³²³

Mr. Anderson's case spotlights one of the most glaring problems in the design of the FEPC. The committee had to wait on complaints to arrive and for complainants to know what information to include in their complaints. Without a strong partnership between the federal FEPC and local black leaders, men like Anderson – who did not understand how to navigate the FEPC complaint process – either failed to respond with additional information or eventually stopped replying to FEPC investigators. Those complainants who did work with strong community leadership in Tulsa, Oklahoma City, and McAlester had a much smoother experience with their FEPC complaints, win or lose.

The federal government worked hard to get FEPC complaints mailed to incorrect places to the agency as fast as possible. This took considerable time and unless complainants had been very thorough in their original letter, or assisted by the local NAACP, the FEPC had to contact them for additional information before proceeding. FEPC complainants who did not begin their process with an official FEPC complaint form and the help of the NAACP were usually never heard from again. Mr. James B/Eddie Anderson being an exception, and even he became so frustrated with a process he did not understand that he soon stopped replying.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ George M. Johnson, Assistant Executive FEPC Secretary to James B. Anderson, February 8, 1943; Cases Closed Unions, Box 14 of 15; Closed Cases, 1943-1945; 228.

The other complaint from Muskogee, that of Haskel J. Shoeboot, illustrates the FEPC's ability to help blacks get jobs and its inability to eliminate employment discrimination. Shoeboot was not hired for two reasons. He was black and had a history of being very outspoken about perceived discrimination. Camp Gruber clearly employed and promoted black workers including skilled mechanics and carpenters. Based on its denial of a position to Shoeboot, however, they also sought to avoid hiring blacks they believed would make trouble or inflame racial tension, a caveat that did not apply to outspoke whites.

In Muskogee, African Americans seeking jobs – skilled and unskilled – at Camp Gruber had to apply for positions at the Muskogee office of the United States Employment Service (USES). After registering and testing for job placement with local USES officials, applicants were placed onto lists of eligibles until Camp Gruber requested candidates for positions. At that time, USES would send a list of eligible candidates ranked by qualification score to personnel officials at Camp Gruber. The local USES office in Muskogee, like those throughout the country, were staffed local officials. When racist whites occupied leadership positions in USES offices, they could easily discriminate against African Americans by refusing to refer black workers. As Ira Katznelson explained in *Fear Itself: the New Deal and the Origins of Our Time*, local USES offices were as likely to exclude black workers as they were to refer them for employment, especially in the case of skilled workers. The USES office in Muskogee exhibited this behavior. The FEPC complaint of Haskel J. Shoeboot demonstrates the power local USES offices could wield and the importance of the FEPC as a check on local white powerbrokers.³²⁴

³²⁴ Ira Katznelson in *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2013), 7466.

In September of 1944, Camp Gruber contacted the Muskogee USES office for a list of candidates for skilled mechanic positions. The USES office placed Haskel J. Shoeboot, a mixed-race man (Native American and African American), on the skilled mechanic eligibles list with other candidates. Shoeboot, a qualified black mechanic, had registered with USES in July of 1944. He had owned and operated a garage for twenty-years and could work on any type of engine, as evidenced by his USES referral. Regardless, Shoeboot was not selected from the eligibles list in September of 1944. In January of 1945, Camp Gruber's garage needed mechanics again an advertisement calling for 160 skilled auto mechanics to address "an urgent" shortage. Shoeboot confirmed his registration with USES to ensure the list of eligible mechanics being referred to Gruber included him. USES again placed place Shoeboot on the list of eligibles.³²⁵

Before sending the list to Camp Gruber, however, this time – January 1945 – USES official Kelsey T. Kennedy, wrote "FTQ (Failure To Qualify)" beside Shoeboot's name. Kennedy recognized Shoeboot as a local black "troublemaker" with a habit of accusing local officials of racial discrimination. At this point, Kennedy and the Muskogee USES office had violated FEPC rules by disqualifying Shoeboot. It was against wartime policy for a USES office to disqualify anyone. USES's purpose was to refer all qualified candidates upon request, ranked by nothing but their civil service test scores, much less disqualify someone because of race. Shoeboot, unaware of Kennedy's action at the USES office, wrote to Captain Fablion of Camp Gruber to ask why he had not been hired. Fablion – basing his answer off the eligibles list Kennedy altered

³²⁵ Roy A. Hoglund, Regional FEPC Director, Region IX to Clarence Mitchell, Director, FEPC, "Re: Complaint of Haskel J. Shoeboot," September 14, 1945; Automobile Shop, Camp Gruber, Refusal to Hire, Box 6 of 15, Closed Cases, 1943-1945; RG 228 and "Auto Mechanics Sought at Camp," *Muskogee Phoenix*, January 12, 1945; Automobile Shop, Camp Gruber, Refusal to Hire, Box 6 of 15, Closed Cases, 1943-1945; RG 228.

at the USES office – told Shoeboot he did not get the job because he was not qualified for the job.³²⁶

After Fablion’s response, Shoeboot filed an FEPC complaint and wrote again accusing the captain of discrimination against him by marking him “FTQ” just because he was a man of color. Shoeboot was correct that his race contributed to the FTQ designation but wrong about who had classified him. The FEPC began an investigation.³²⁷ On May 21, 1945, Earl B. Butler deputy director for maintenance at Camp Gruber, reported to Mr. Sartin, director of personnel, also at Gruber, that Shoeboot had indeed been denied employment twice. The first time “he was considered . . . to be unqualified and of an undesirable character.” As records of the first referral sheet Shoeboot appeared on do not survive, he may have been marked FTQ by Kennedy even then. When he applied the second time “he was still considered to be unqualified and of undesirable character.” Clearly the labor shortage had not secured Shoeboot a job. Gruber employed other black mechanics. Joe A Mayo, a black mechanic, was one of the skilled workers. Mayo began work at the facility in September of 1944. He was well-regarded and promoted from “an armorer, grade 13, step 1 at \$.92” per hour and was promoted on May

³²⁶ Roy A. Hogle, Regional FEPC Director, Region IX to Clarence Mitchell, Director, FEPC, “Re: Complaint of Haskel J. Shoeboot,” September 14, 1945; Automobile Shop, Camp Gruber, Refusal to Hire, Box 6 of 15, Closed Cases, 1943-1945; RG 228.

³²⁷ Haskel Shoeboot to Captain Fablion, Camp Gruber, September 29, 1944, Automobile Shop, Camp Gruber, Refusal to Hire, Box 6 of 15, Closed Cases, 1943-1945; RG 228; Haskel J. Shoeboot to George M. Johnson, Assistant Executive FEPC Secretary, January 21, 1945; Automobile Shop, Camp Gruber, Refusal to Hire, Box 6 of 15, Closed Cases, 1943-1945; RG 228; “Referral Card: Haskel J. Shoeboot, Employer’s Copy,” United States Employment Service (USES), September 29, 1944; Automobile Shop, Camp Gruber, Refusal to Hire, Box 6 of 15, Closed Cases, 1943-1945; RG 228 and Roy A. Hogle, Regional FEPC Director, Region IX to Haskel J. Shoeboot, May 5, 1945; Automobile Shop, Camp Gruber, Refusal to Hire, Box 6 of 15, Closed Cases, 1943-1945; RG 228.

15, 1945 to “armor, grade 12, step 2, \$.97 per hour.” Additionally, Gruber employed black carpenters at the facility although exact numbers are not known.³²⁸

On May 21, 1945, A. M. Sonntag, the regional director for the Civil Service Commission, wrote Roy A. Hoglund to strongly encourage him to not pursue the complaint made by Shoeboot. The letter began, “there is question in our minds as to whether your office would be interested in making an investigation of refusal to employ a worker rated as eligible on the basis that he did not have adequate qualifications for the work.” Sonntag, then went to great pains to justify the decision to mark Shoeboot as unqualified. Claiming he had a “chronic record of registering complaints on the basis of race” and that other officials at the Muskogee USES office agreed Shoeboot “was of undesirable character” as well. In addition to the unusualness of a letter from USES offering reasons why the FEPC should not investigate a validly filed complaint, it seems very odd that the Regional Directory for USES would contact the FEPC over a local issue. Sonntag closed by requesting Hoglund contact him if he decided to pursue an investigation.³²⁹

In addition to the evidence of skilled black mechanics working at Camp Gruber, the complaint of Haskel Shoeboot supports Katznelson’s argument of local racism driving USES referrals and the importance of the FEPC as a check on those local officials. The complaint also reinforces the argument that defense facilities operated by the federal government via the

³²⁸ Earl B. Butler, Major Ordnance, Deputy Director for Maintenance to Mr. Sartin, Director of Personnel, Camp Gruber May 21, 1945; Automobile Shop, Camp Gruber, Refusal to Hire, Box 6 of 15, Closed Cases, 1943-1945; RG 228 and Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, “War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports,” May 8, 1943. Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

³²⁹ A. M. Sonntag, the Regional Director Civil Service Commission to Roy A. Hoglund, FEPC Regional Director, Region IX, May 21, 1945; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

military – like Camp Gruber, OCAD, and the McAlester Depot – were aware of and complied with FEPC rules when making hiring decisions. Local white civilians working on behalf of the government were the problem like at Spartan Aircraft or Douglas Aircraft or National Zinc in Bartlesville.

Bartlesville

Quite simply, African Americans in Bartlesville were not nearly as successful at utilizing the FEPC to secure black jobs as their peers in Oklahoma City, Tulsa, McAlester, or Muskogee. Bartlesville, a small city 45 miles north of Tulsa had a disadvantage compared to all other cities examined in this study. It did not have a local black newspaper or several full time activists and while it did have a local NAACP branch. Unlike McAlester hiring was controlled by private interests rather than military personnel. The city did not gain any new defense industries during World War II. Instead, defense contracts went to existing companies like National Zinc with long histories of racially based employment discrimination. National Zinc had a close-shop agreement with the lily white local of the United Acid Smelter Workers Union. In this challenging environment, even the FEPC could not break the union and get blacks hired at National Zinc. The African American community of Bartlesville was too small and the city's NAACP too weak to provide enough pressure.³³⁰

Bartlesville, the first oil boomtown in Oklahoma, was named after Jacob Bartles, a white man who had married into a Native American family to gain access to land and oil deposits. The

³³⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940*, "Composition of the Population, by Counties: 1940," 828 and "Race and Age, by Sex, with Rural-Farm Population, For Minor Civil divisions, by Counties, 1940," 908. <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-volume-2/33973538v2p5ch8.pdf>, (accessed July 28, 2021).

town was incorporated in 1897 the year the first commercial oil well in the territory came in. By 1907, the city had three smelters taking advantage of nearby precious metal deposits: Lanyon-Starr, Bartlesville Zinc, and National Zinc. Smelters were essential war industries in both World Wars but only National Zinc operated through both conflicts. In World War II the facility employed as many as 700 white workers. The smelter, along with Phillips Petroleum was one of the largest employers in the city. Phillips Petroleum, however, officially endorsed the policies of the FEPC and no records suggest they were insincere about hiring African Americans in Oklahoma.³³¹

During World War II, National Zinc of Bartlesville, operated as a closed shop with all workers represented by the United Acid Smelter Workers Union, Local 70, part of the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelters Workers.³³² Reverend R. A. Johnson, the local NAACP president, brought the situation to the attention of the FEPC and the Lewis Clymer of the War Manpower Commission in late July 1942. National Zinc employed 550 men and had employed over 580 in 1941. None of those men were black. Instead of merely contacting local officials and lengthening the process, Johnson requested Clymer deal with the situation in person and suggested he also involve Reed Robinson representative of the international union.³³³

³³¹ Jon D. May, "Bartlesville," *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*, <https://www.okhistory.org/publications/enc/entry.php?entry=BA026> (accessed July 31, 2021). Roy A. Hoglund, Regional FEPC Director, Region IX to Ed McDonald, Regional Director, War Manpower Commission, December 15, 1944 and Roy A. Hoglund, Regional FEPC Director, Region IX to Ed McDonald, Regional Director, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, December 15, 1944; Folder 533.15, Box #30, Regional Central Files, 1942-45; RG 211.

³³² "Army Flanks Navy to Honor State Plant," *The Daily Oklahoman*, August 11, 1942.

³³³ Lewis Clymer, Minorities Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX to Dr. Robert C. Weaver, FEPC Secretary, "Field Report," August 9, 1942; Cases Closed Unions, Box 14 of 15, Cases Closed, 1941-1945; RG 228.

In August of 1942, Lewis W. Clymer of the War Manpower Commission visited the Oklahoma National Zinc Company. While there, Clymer assembled Rev. Johnson, W. H. Leverett, General Manager; B. D. Buff, Smelter Superintendent; J. D. Hertgiz, Superintendent, Acid Plant; Mr. Fish, President, Local No. 70, and R.W. Hughes, Vice President, Local No. 70, to find a solution. The group discussed the options available to secure the hiring of African American workers at the facility. The comments recounted by Clymer again highlight the repeated problems of local union officials blocking integration regardless of how much their regional, national, or international leaders believed in the policy.³³⁴

Mr. Fish, president of the local, and the management of the of the Zinc Company quickly promised to clear the way for black employees. Fish noted that his union “as a matter of form [has a] Constitution” dedicated to interracial cooperation and that they stood with the CIO against the discrimination of any worker because of their race. In so doing, the company and unions supported the FEPC and abided by its rules. The vice president of the local, Marshall, did not agree at all. He proclaimed local union members had already made it clear to him they would not accept black workers in their segregated local or even as non-union workers. Clymer told Marshall he understood the official had “a personal opinion that [African Americans] should not be employed at this plant nor be allowed membership in the union.” He pointed out, however, that Marshall’s opinion did not matter in the face wartime needs and the guiding principles of the FEPC. Clymer ends the meeting with a recommendation that “extraordinary means be used to see that Negro workers are afforded an opportunity to work at this plant.”³³⁵

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Ibid

He did not, however, specify what those extraordinary means were, but the only true enforcement power the FEPC had was to pull defense contracts from the facility, something the committee did not do for the duration of the war.

In the final report, Lewis Clymer admits that he and the FEPC were powerless against such local unions. In an attempt to increase pressure Clymer instructed Rev. Johnson to have qualified blacks to apply for jobs directly with the company as that might allow them to sidestep the union. If they applied directly to the facility and were not hired because they were not union members, the FEPC could then investigate and work with regional and national officials to break the union's all-white hold at National Zinc. Three men applied and were refused for not meeting the Zinc Company's union membership requirement, an indication their loyalties lay with the white unions. Had they truly wanted to employ blacks, they would have hired the three men who applied directly to the facility.³³⁶

The War Manpower Commission and the FEPC investigated but were unable to force the union to admit blacks or to make the company end closed-shop operations. As a result of the intransigence of the smelters union and the reluctance of National Zinc to anger the union, Lewis Clymer reluctantly closed the case with an alarming acknowledgement. "It is a union matter, and no employment of Negroes can be expected until the union agrees to their employment." The FEPC, local black leaders, company management, and international union leaders turned out to be powerless against local union officials. Locals held an extraordinary amount of power, especially when operating in a closed-shop essential war industry. The war

³³⁶ Lewis Clymer, Minority Placement Specialist, War Manpower Commission, Region IX, "War Manpower Commission Weekly Reports," May 8, 1943; Folder 533.15, Box 30, Progress Reports 1942-1945; RG 211.

effort meant the company would not be forced to do anything that could disrupt production and the smelters union had vowed to do just that before they would admit African Americans into their ranks or work alongside them.³³⁷

For the FEPC to work, conditions had to be almost perfect. Ideally conditions included new defense facilities, a black newspaper, and an activist community. If any of these conditions were not present, and at times even if they were, the FEPC struggled to make progress. After reviewing FEPC cases originating outside of the Tulsa and Oklahoma City metro areas, the following conclusions can be made. African Americans got jobs – both skilled and unskilled – throughout the region – at Camp Gruber in Muskogee, at Naval Munitions factory in McAlester, and at Phillips in Bartlesville. The FEPC, regardless of successes, was not perfect in all situations and could not breakdown all employment barriers to African Americans. Employment conditions differed widely from city to city as did results. Whereas Tulsa and Oklahoma City benefited heavily from having local black newspapers, the absence of one did not guarantee FEPC failures. As opposed to Bartlesville, Muskogee and McAlester saw progress in the hiring of skilled black workers. Both cities also benefited from high African American population numbers and labor shortages. Yet, the argument that labor shortages are exclusively responsible for FEPC successes is not true. Labor shortages certainly helped the situation but as proven by white union locals and local USES offices in Oklahoma, without the FEPC, success – especially in relation to skilled workers – would have been truncated, at best. Furthermore, the FEPC played a crucial role in mediating the differences between the national goals of unions

³³⁷ Ibid

and government agencies like USES and the refusal of local whites to enact hiring policies consistent with the FEPC goals.

Forward to Brown

Three months after the end of World War II, the McAlester Branch of the NAACP hosted the 11th Annual Conference for the Oklahoma State Conference of Branches. The event had been publicized for weeks and billed as a not-to-be-missed occasion featuring a “galaxy of outstanding race leaders.” As usual, the Oklahoma meeting drew several important national leaders such as William Pickens, NAACP National Field Secretary, and Thurgood Marshall, head of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. The event shows the Oklahoma NAACP at its height – powerful and militant. There were 800 attendees, including at least one representative from each of the state’s 86 branches, and a sizable portion of white conventioners. In a show of progress made on the World War II homefront Joe Durnoncourt, the white state president of the CIO, had a keynote speaking role in which he plead for African Americans to “join the ranks of Union labor.” But it was Thurgood Marshall’s address that would change the trajectory of the organization. He announced a new initiative. The NAACP wanted to attack segregation in higher education, and it wanted Oklahoma to take the lead. The conference ended with the establishment of the state’s new goal for the year. The Oklahoma State Council of Branches would again lead the way by launching “a determined struggled to secure educational equality for the 200,000 Negroes of Oklahoma.” These efforts directly led to the landmark *Sipuell* and *McLaurin* cases and culminated in the transformative *Brown v Board of Education* (1954) decision.³³⁸

³³⁸ Denver Nicks and Johns Nicks, *Conviction: The Murder Trial That Powered Thurgood Marshall’s Fight for Civil Rights* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2019), 30-31, “Plan to Attend the McAlester Meeting,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, October 6, 1945; and “State NAACP Conference Plans Bold Attack Upon Educational Inequalities in Sooner State,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, November 10, 1945.

The FEPC prevented a repeat of the World War I home front experience that decimated black organizations and halted civil rights momentum. The agency also secured black jobs and, as a result, created black wealth and gave the NAACP something to fight during World War II without being accused of being unpatriotic. The FEPC also demonstrated the importance of statist approaches to civil rights advances to black leaders across the nation. The NAACP – locally and nationally – hit the ground running after World War II. Black newspapers enjoyed all-time circulation highs and experienced leaders and organizers abounded following the conflict. Most importantly, African Americans had a taste of victory via federal intervention and were determined to win more Jim Crow battles. The NAACP in Oklahoma emerged from the war more savvy, confident, and militant than ever. Had the FEPC not created substantial gains for African Americans, and, instead, failed to the extent some scholars have suggested, post-war victories integrating education might not have been possible.

Committee's End

Black activists throughout Oklahoma were furious that Congress refused to make the FEPC permanent at the end of the war. The agency had delivered for them, and they fought to keep it. Again, it is difficult to imagine fighting to keep an unsuccessful organization. Not only had the FEPC paid immediate benefits to Black workers but also given activists a cause to rally behind. Working to secure jobs in the defense industries had been the glue that had kept civil rights organizations together during the war. Congress's refusal to continue to the FEPC had the potential to undermine the unity that black organizations had developed.

On September 4, 1945, just a month after the end of the war, the *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, told of the fates of the FEPC Regional Office, its director Roy Heglund, and Lewis

Clymer, the Minority Placement Specialist for the War Manpower Commission in Region IX: “FEPC Headquarters Orders KC Regional Office Closed,” and “Four States to Lose Service of WMC Placement Specialist.” The office was one of five closed in an attempt keep the FEPC operating with a budget set by an anti-FEPC congress. Clymer was informed on August 1945 his position would end on the 24th of that month. Issues formally or formerly handled by Lewis Clymer and Roy Hoglund would now be addressed by a War Manpower Commission official based in Washington, D.C. and one field director for the region. The loss – especially of Clymer – was devastating to African American leaders in Oklahoma.³³⁹

Clymer was the only African Americans employed on an administration level in the War Manpower Commission in the four-state area. He is the person to whom complaints were sent by workers denied employment because of race, or if they were denied upgrading, or if discrimination practices influenced the conditions under which they worked. He conferred and [negotiated] with employers and brought about adjustments satisfactory to both workers and management.³⁴⁰ Without Hoglund and Clymer, Roscoe Dunjee knew the coming situation in the region would disadvantage black Oklahomans. The reorganization made it “impossible to handle effectively the complaints of discrimination with such a reduced force.”³⁴¹

Proactive until the end, the *Dispatch*, urged Lewis Clymer to appeal his dismissal. A group of black Oklahomans disputed some of the facts around Clymer’s termination. The War Manpower Commission said they cut Clymer’s position in the reorganization because of his lack

³³⁹ “FEPC Headquarters Orders KC Regional Office Closed,” *The Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, September 4, 1945.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*

of seniority. As Dunjee argued, as the only African American to have risen to an administrative position within the region, Clymer had the most seniority as far as African Americans were concerned. The Oklahoma race leaders conferred with Ed McDonald, the Regional War Manpower Commission head, to argue for Clymer's retention. They told him the twin losses of Clymer and the Regional FEPC office would be considered a double-cross by black Oklahomans. The citizens committee felt keeping an African American in an administrative position was the goal. If reorganization had to happen, black Oklahomans wanted the field director to be Lewis Clymer.³⁴²

A week later, on August 25, 1945, the efforts of the Oklahoma City NAACP finally hit an obstacle they could not overcome. The *Dispatch* announced the news, "Douglas Discharges 20,500 Workers in State." When Congress refused to continue funding the FEPC in 1946, the Committee shuttered. Massive layoffs, the firing of Clymer, and the shuttering of the FEPC left civil rights activists in Oklahoma unsure about how to proceed – which of the dozen or so pressing issues to center their movement around. Marshall's speech, though, provided this direction and accelerated a movement that was already underway.³⁴³

Legacies of the FEPC

The Oklahoma NAACP's approach to FEPC made the integration of education possible. With the jobs the FEPC and activism enable, African Americans in Oklahoma ended the war in a position of strength and devotion to statist strategies. The transition from defense jobs to education integration as a goal was logical and a continuation of some aspects of the FEPC

³⁴² "Clymer Urged to Appeal Dismissal," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, August 18, 1945 and "Douglas Discharges 20,500 Workers in State," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, August 25, 1945.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*

fight. Dunjee had delivered the earliest blows to Jim Crow education when he forced the state of Oklahoma to allow blacks to be taught in defense courses provided by the federal government. Appealing to federal courts to intervene in against Oklahoma's education laws that mandated segregation made sense as a natural extension of the statist arguments made to secure defense training.

The Oklahoma activists had already begun work on education issues before Marshall's speech. On June 2, 1945, two months before the official end of World War II, the *Black Dispatch*, fired a shot across the bow of the Oklahoma Board of Regents, signaling that its militancy would continue after the war and build on the successes of the FEPC. The paper reported conditions at Langston University had become so bad that the facility was no longer a suitable option as a higher education facility for black Oklahomans. Decades of underfunding and neglect had taken their toll. Not only were structures in disrepair, but Langston offered few fields of study, no graduate programming, and remained unaccredited. The paper threatened that if things did not improve rapidly and extensively, black students would have no choice but to seek admission at white state schools. Additionally, the State Conference of Branches vowed to spend up to \$500,000 for the ensuing legal fight. The huge amount of money pledged signaled the Oklahoma NAACP would make the state pay dearly for maintaining Jim Crow. The State of Oklahoma would have taken them seriously as black Oklahomans had already funded several cases that went to the Supreme Court before and during World War II. The fact that the State Conference could safely claim their organization powerful enough to raise \$500,000 for an integration fight is due to the success black Oklahomans had with the FEPC during World War II. The combination of militant activism,

NAACP leadership, and FEPC support meant more jobs and better wages, especially in skilled positions. In turn, black Oklahomans were better able to financially support an organization that had delivered civil rights breakthroughs for them several times since statehood.³⁴⁴

Sipuel and McLaurin

The Supreme Court cases of Ada Lois Sipuel and George W. McLaurin demonstrate the power of the Oklahoma NAACP, flush with benefits won with the FEPC, post-World War II. In his speech in McAlester, Marshall outlined several reasons the assault on Jim Crow education should start in Oklahoma. World War II slowed down early efforts to integrate higher education. The earliest triumph came in 1935 when Maryland reluctantly admitted Donald Murray into law school. As Dunjee wrote, if blacks could study law at the University of Maryland, they could do it at the University of Oklahoma as well. Additionally, in 1938, the Supreme Court ruled in *Gaines v. Canada*, that the state of Missouri had to fully uphold “separate but equal” facilities and they had to do it in state. *Gaines* established states had to provide African Americans will the same educational opportunities they provided whites, including graduate and professional programs. Additionally, states could no longer give scholarships to black students for them to go out of state for educational access. In short, Missouri could either admit Lloyd Gaines into the law school or they could build him one. Marshall tried another case in Missouri in 1940, but the state simply shut down the School of Journalism rather than integrate or build a segregated school. Marshall (and Dunjee) felt Oklahoma would be an excellent place to take advantage of their early victories. Oklahoma only

³⁴⁴ “NAACP Geared to Demand Better Education,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, June 2, 1945.

had one option for black higher education in the state, Langston University, and it was falling apart, underfunded, and had no graduate options for blacks. Under the *Gaines* precedent, Oklahoma clearly failed to provide “separate and equal education opportunities for African Americans.”³⁴⁵

The plan of attack had two prongs. The first would focus on integrating black students into graduate and professional programs at the University of Oklahoma and the “A&M College at Stillwater.” The greatest inequalities between white colleges and Langston University were in the graduate programs. The white institutions offered more than 70 graduate programs that were not available at Langston. The State Conference of Branches knew Oklahoma could in no way afford to create that many options. The second goal hoped to get the state to throw enough money at Langston that it could finally be accredited. These twin goals are consistent with Oklahoma NAACP planning. They, of course, sought to integrate higher education nationwide, but they had a secondary goal too. The accreditation of Langston had been a long-time goal in Oklahoma. If black Oklahomans could at least improve Langston, their efforts would be judged successful. The president of the Oklahoma Board of Regents, upon hearing of planned integration efforts, released a statement arguing Langston did not have to be

³⁴⁵ George Lynn Cross, *Blacks in White Colleges: Oklahoma’s Landmark Cases* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975). Kindle 31, 66, 80; John Henry Lee Thompson, “The Little Caesar of civil rights: Roscoe Dunjee in Oklahoma City, 1915 to 1955, PhD diss. (Purdue University, 1990), 137-138, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/303860114> (accessed July 26, 2021); Nicks and Nicks, *Conviction*, 12, 30-31, 137-138; “Plan to Attend the McAlester Meeting,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, October 6, 1945; “State NAACP Conference Plans Bold Attack Upon Educational Inequalities in Sooner State,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, November 10, 1945 and “Oh Ye Of Little Faith,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, January 24, 1948.

accredited because there were also unaccredited white schools in the state, the first of many excuses and creative reasoning on the part of Oklahoma.³⁴⁶

To launch the attack on Oklahoma's system of higher education, the NAACP need to find a plaintiff. W. A. J. Bullock, president of the Southwestern Region of the State Conference of Branches, took the lead, and on Christmas Day 1945, he visited the Sipuel family in Chickasha to recruit Lemuel Sipuel at apply to law school at the University of Oklahoma. Sipuel was a World War II veteran and a graduate of Langston University. His involvement would join the two attacks as the ensuing legal battle would have to deal with integration *and* the accreditation issue. Lemuel, however, declined. He dreamed of going to Howard Law School and felt he had already delayed his law career enough because of World War II.³⁴⁷ In a stroke of terrible irony, Howard eventually refused to admit Leumel Sipuel into law school because he studied at Langston University, an unaccredited institution.³⁴⁸

If her brother was not interested, Ada wanted the opportunity to do race work. She sat forward after Leumel declined and proclaimed, "I'll be it for freedom's sake." Ada Sipuel's life to that point made her a better candidate than her brother, especially for a long legal battle. She exuded passion for race work. She and her family moved to Chickasha after losing everything in the 1921 Tulsa Massacre. The event made the whole family militant. After whites lynched Henry Argo in Chickasha in 1930, the family went to work. Sipuel's mother led efforts to replace

³⁴⁶ "Plan to Attend the McAlester Meeting," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, October 6, 1945; "State NAACP Conference Plans Bold Attack Upon Educational Inequalities in Sooner State," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, November 10, 1945, Nicks and Nicks, *Conviction*, 30-31 and Cross, *Blacks in White Colleges*, 31.

³⁴⁷ Clara Luper Collection, "Notes for Roscoe Dunjee Book," Writings of Clara Luper, Box 58, Clara Luper Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 191-194 and Nicks and Nicks, 191-194.

³⁴⁸ "Brother of Ada Lois Sipuel Denied Entrance to Howard University School of Law", *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, September 7, 1946 and Cross, *Blacks in White Colleges*, 193.

the sheriff who gave lynchers access to Argo. The family raised funds by selling homemade bumper stickers reading “TO HELL WITH MATT SANKEY,” an incredibly brave thing to do. The sheriff did not get reelected. Ada Sipuel also remembered being in awe of Thurgood Marshall when he visited her school during a tour of state branches. She was amazed to see Marshall and Bullock – two black lawyers – together. She determined then and there she would become a lawyer “to make a difference.”³⁴⁹

On January 14, 1946, Ada Lois Sipuel, Roscoe Dunjee, and W. A. J. Bullock met with George L. Cross, president of the University of Oklahoma. When they arrived, Sipuel presented her credentials and asked to enroll in the law program. Cross began to explain Oklahoma’s segregated education laws. Dunjee stopped him before he could finish. He explained he and his two companions were well acquainted with the law. The state legislature was determined to prevent integration. School administrators who admitted black students or lectured to black or mixed classes would be fined \$100-\$500 per day. Students who attended classes with black students were to be fined \$4-\$20 per day. Dunjee also knew the State of Oklahoma offered scholarships to send blacks out of state for higher education in violation of the *Gaines* decision. What they wanted to know is if Cross planned to follow the Oklahoma law or the Supreme Court’s ruling. To Cross’ credit, he claimed he supported integration and asked what the group needed to further their efforts. If not admission, Sipuel hoped for a letter stating the only

³⁴⁹ “Brother of Ada Lois Sipuel Denied Entrance to Howard University School of Law”, *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, September 7, 1946 and Luper Book Notes.

reason she could not be admitted was due to her race. Cross wrote the letter at the direction of Dunjee. The group left with its prize.”³⁵⁰

In less than two years, the Sipuel case went to Cleveland County District Court multiple times, the federal court in western Oklahoma, and eventually the United States Supreme Court. In Cleveland County Court on February 23, 1946, Judge Williams sided with the State of Oklahoma’s contention that state law prevented African Americans and whites from attending the same school. At the Supreme Court, Thurgood Marshall argued the 14th Amendment granted equal protection under the law and that the *Plessy* decision dictated Oklahoma had to provide *equal* education accommodations. Marshall’s insistence that a case from Oklahoma would be easily winnable proved correct. The court took just four days to reach a decision on January 12, 1948. “Oklahoma must provide a legal education for the petitioner and provided it as soon as it would be provided for the applicants of any other racial group.”³⁵¹

In response to the Supreme Court decision, Oklahoma Attorney General Mac Q. Williamson maintained the opinion did not invalidate Oklahoma segregation law. Rather, the state only had to provide a solution to the petitioner’s problem. That meant, according to Williamson, Sipuel would not be admitted to the University of Oklahoma. Instead, the state planned to create Langston Law School in the state capitol building. Dunjee reported that Sipuel would attend the University of Oklahoma’s Law School and would never consider attending a “make-shift” institution. The very next day, however, the state produced an enrollee, T. N.

³⁵⁰ “Brilliant Negro Girl Barred From Enrollment at Oklahoma University,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, January 19, 1946; Cross, *Blacks in White Colleges*, 32, 35-37 and Nicks and Nicks, *Conviction*, 32.

³⁵¹ “Hall and Carter Start Sipuel Suit,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, February 23, 1946; “State Draws Final Brief In Ada Lois Sipuel Case,” *Oklahoma Eagle*, January 8, 1948 and Cross, *Blacks in White Colleges*, 40-49, 50-52.

Roberts from Oklahoma City. To this development, Dunjee responded with just two words, "Uncle Tom."³⁵²

As Sipuel's case and law school admission continued to be slowed down by the state, Dunjee worked to increase pressure. True to form, he was the vanguard and used the *Black Dispatch* to act in accord with the community's demands for integration *now*.³⁵³ The State Conference of Branches and the Oklahoma Chapter were far more hesitant. On January 29, 1948, the last day of open enrollment, six new African American students, accompanied by a *Black Dispatch* reporter and a member of the Oklahoma City NAACP, arrived to enroll in graduate programs they could not get at Langston. Helen M. Holmes, a graduate of Lincoln University in Missouri sought a graduate degree in Commercial education. Ivor Tatum, graduate from the University of Kansas wanted graduate education in Social Work. The remaining four students were from Oklahoma and had connections to Langston University. Again, the state could not challenge the unaccredited status of Langston without acknowledging it was unequal to white state schools.³⁵⁴

Mozell A. Dillion and Mrs. Mauderie Hancock Wilson were Langston Graduates and interested in Architectural Engineering and Social Work, respectively. The final two were members of the Langston faculty. James Bond sought a PhD in zoology, and George W. McLaurin, who would become the focus of the NAACPs efforts, wanted a PhD in education."³⁵⁵ The applicants were well prepared and explained to hesitant registrars that the Sipuel decision,

³⁵² Luper Book Notes.

³⁵³ "Ada Lois Sipuel Rejected at O.U.; Fight Back to D.C.," *the Oklahoma Eagle*, January 29, 1948 and Cross, *Blacks in White Colleges*, 52-56.

³⁵⁴ "Shown above are the six race students who applied for enrollment at the University of Oklahoma on Thursday of last week.," *the Oklahoma Eagle*, February 5, 1948 and Cross, *Blacks in White Colleges*, 65-67.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid*

released two weeks earlier, meant they had to be enrolled. Furthermore, one detail proves just how far ahead Dunjee remained of NAACP headquarters. Each applicant “swore up and down that the NAACP had nothing to do with” their applying together on the last possible day accompanied by a reporter and NAACP member. They also acknowledged they had purposely waited until the last day to make it impossible for the state to create new separate programs before the semester began. The university extended its enrollment period so that the State Board of Regents could be consulted.³⁵⁶

By summer, McLaurin and the other students had still not been admitted to their respective programs. On Jun 17, 1948, NAACP lawyers petitioned for writs of mandamus that would force the university to admit McLaurin, Maxine Holmes and Mauderie Hancock.³⁵⁷ Attorney General Williamson attacked the lateness of the applications and said the state had not been given enough time to create new graduate programs to meet the needs of the black applicants.³⁵⁸ Tired of the state’s continual delays and excuses, the McLaurin suit in Cleveland County was dropped in favor of filing directly with Federal District Court. Again, black Oklahoman’s pushed the envelope. McLaurin again applied to the university. This time the state argued the Sipuel decision only applied specifically to her.³⁵⁹ The federal district court ruled that McLaurin had to be admitted or the University of Oklahoma had to stop offering all graduate programs in education.³⁶⁰ At this point, Attorney General Williams reported to the Board of Regents and governor that the state had no more wiggle room. They had to admit

³⁵⁶ Cross, *Blacks in White Colleges*, 66-67

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 85

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 87-88.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

McLaurin, or shut down programs, but, he argued, McLaurin could be segregated on campus. The Board of Regents stalled and asked for a feasibility study.³⁶¹

Regardless of tactics, there was no escaping that the Regents were growing increasingly nervous about the direction of events. Amos T. Hall announced he would apply for an injunction from federal court forcing the university to act. According to now former university president Cross, this is when the state broke. While waiting to hear a response to Hall's injunction, the university decided to admit McLaurin, but on a segregated basis. He would be separated from white students in all ways possible. He occupied roped-off areas in classrooms, cafeterias, and in the library.³⁶² At this point, the legislature passed new laws allowing for black admission on a segregated basis. While the state had delayed, their situation had worsened. As this played out, in the summer of 1949, 34 new black Oklahoman's had applied for graduate programs. When the state closed the Langston Law School, Ada Lois Sipuel-Fisher reapplied only to again be denied. President Cross, learning of the situation, reversed it and finally admitted Mrs. Sipuel-Fisher.³⁶³

Having successfully integrated graduate education in Oklahoma, the NAACP now turned its attention to removing the segregation black students had to endure on campus. The NAACP filed with the Federal District Court of Western Oklahoma and asked for McLaurin to be admitted on a nonsegregated basis. November 22, 1948, the Federal district court denied the petition. When appeals reached the Supreme Court, a United States Attorney argued on behalf

³⁶¹ Ibid. 89-91.

³⁶² Ibid. 91-96.

³⁶³ "Ada Sipuel Case Won, O.U. Head Order Her Entry," *The Oklahoma Eagle*, June 23, 1950 and Cross, *Blacks in White Colleges*, 111-113.

of *McLaurin*, another milestone. The Court announced its opinion in favor of *McLaurin* on June 5, 1950.³⁶⁴

The conditions under which this appellant is required to receive his education deprive him of his personal and present right to the equal protection of the laws. We hold that under these circumstances the Fourteenth Amendment precludes differences in treatment by the state based upon race. Appellant having been admitted to a state-supported graduate school, most receive the same treatment at the hands of the state as students of other races.³⁶⁵

The *Sipuel* and *McLaurin* cases were earthshaking. Together, with *Sweatt v. Painter*, (1950) a case coming out of Texas, they integrated graduate programs at public universities on a non-segregated basis. To top it all off, Langston University got increased funding and accreditation, if back-handedly.³⁶⁶ The victories were built on the shoulders of the wartime successes fighting for black jobs and only possible due to the work of the Roscoe Dunjee and the Oklahoma State Conference of Branches. Their funding efforts and ability to make the success of the cases the personal responsibility of black Oklahomans, made the difference. Dunjee's paper avidly followed events and encouraged its readers to become involved for the good of the race.³⁶⁷ The hundreds of people who applied while *Sipuel* and *McLaurin* wound their way through the state and federal court systems guaranteed Oklahoma could not financially stop integration. At the same time, the special committee appointed by the governor

³⁶⁴ "Federal Attorney Joins NAACP in Attack on 'Separate but Equal' Doctrine of Southland," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, February 18, 1950 and Cross, *Blacks in White Colleges*, 96, 105-106, 111-113.

³⁶⁵ G. W. *McLaurin V. Oklahoma State Regents For Higher Education, Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma, et al.* (339 US 637-642) and Cross, *Blacks and White Colleges*, 147.

³⁶⁶ "A Church Steeple on a Honky Tonk," *The Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, March 20, 1948 and "Eight Hundred Pickett Committee," *The Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, February 25, 1945.

³⁶⁷ "Get Ready to Enroll," *The Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, November 20, 1948; "Two More Knock At Doors of O.U.," *The Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, February 5, 1949; "Five Ask Admission To Oklahoma U.," *The Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, February 5, 1949; "Seek Deadline Enrollment At O.U.; Students Stage Campus Protest; NAACP Seeks Mandamus," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, January 31, 1948; "Graduate Training Battle Renewed at Norman," *The Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, June 5, 1948 and "If It Is Not At Langston," *The Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, August 21, 1948.

reported it would cost \$10-\$12 million dollars to create the necessary programs and an additional \$500,000 per year to maintain.³⁶⁸ Furthermore, Dunjee had been working with student and faculty groups from the university for decades. The cases were the tipping point for student and faculty activism. There were large protests on campus and several student and faculty groups became directly involved in race work through Dunjee.³⁶⁹

In June of 1950, the *Dispatch*, full of pride, reported on scene at the University of Oklahoma when black Oklahomans gathered en masse to enroll just five days after the McLaurin decision was announced.

More Than 100 Negroes Swarm Oklahoma University Campus:

It is conservatively estimated that more than 100 Negroes coming from all over Oklahoma, crowded the campus Wednesday, offering themselves for enrollment. The huge throng was easily identified in the crowd at 10:00 o'clock when enrollment started, and they throughout the day could be found in the administration building, the field house, the education building, and all over the campus of the institution. In the cafeteria at noon Negroes sat indiscriminately all over the dining hall and were served along with the other [white] enrollees.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁸ "The Prohibitive Cost of Segregated Higher Education," *The Oklahoma Eagle*, March 3, 1949; "Which is the Right Approach," *The Oklahoma Eagle*, August 5, 1948; "What About Oklahoma's Integrity," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, March 8, 1947; "Oklahoma Admits Segregation Too Costly," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, January 17, 1948; "On to Norman and Stillwater," *The Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, June 4, 1949 and Cross, *Blacks in White Colleges*, 75-76.

³⁶⁹ "University Faculty Favors Enrollment of Negro Students," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, November 24, 1945; "'Negroes Should Enroll Here' Says O.U. Co-Ed," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, December 6, 1946; "Students at Norman Want NAACP Branch," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, December 6, 1946; "'Much At Langston Worthless and Dangerous' Say O.U. Students," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, December 15, 1945; "Liberalism Alerts Itself," *The Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, January 31, 1948; "Oklahoma University Votes on Segregation," *The Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, April 16, 1949; "6 Seek Deadline Enrollment At O.U.; Students Stage Campus Protest; NAACP Seeks Mandamus," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, January 31, 1948; "Oklahoma University Students Burn Fourteenth Amendment," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, January 31, 1948 and Cross, *Blacks and White Colleges*, 68

³⁷⁰ "More Than 100 Negroes Swarm Oklahoma University Campus," *The Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, June 10, 1950.

The success resolution of the *Sipuel* and *McLaurin* decisions demonstrates the long-term legacy of the FEPC. Without World War II economic opportunities gained through the efforts of the FEPC, cases like *Sipuel* and *McLaurin* would not have been possible.

The Prince Hall Masons and the Legal Defense Fund

The *Sipuel* and *McLaurin* cases laid the foundation for *Brown v Board of Education* (1954). Again, Oklahoma led the way. The *Sipuel* and *McLaurin* decisions were long and costly fights that left the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund close to empty. Oklahoma's impressive fundraising had enabled those cases to be funded but failed to place the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund on solid financial footing.

Ironically, at the very time that, the Oklahoma State Conference was winning at the Supreme Court it was losing members and branches. In 1946 the state conference boasted eighty-eight branches, the all-time high. By 1948, however, the *Black Dispatch* lamented what they called a state of "indifference and lack of interest" across Oklahoma. Memberships were declining and branches were closing. Oklahoma City and Tulsa – the flagship branches in the state – both suffered from "considerable slump[s] in membership," a problem that also "dominated the national picture" for the NAACP. In 1949, Tulsa was down to 150 members from wartime highs of almost 1500, and down from 450 the previous year. The end of war jobs and FEPC protections clearly had an ongoing negative effect on the membership and long-term fundraising numbers of the State Conference of Branches.³⁷¹

³⁷¹ "Join the NAACP 'Make it a Million Drive,'" *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, March 29, 1947; "Join THE NAACP Today," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, May 3, 1947; "Do You Belong to THE NAACP?," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, February 21, 1948; "NAACP Drive On," *The Oklahoma Eagle*, April 22, 1948; "The NAACP," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, June 26, 1948; "The NAACP Membership Drive," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, July 17, 1948; "Big Dividends for Just a Dollar Join the NAACP," *The Oklahoma Eagle*, July 5, 1948; "Majority of Citizens Fail to Share Financial Load of Five NAACP CASES," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, September 4, 1948; "Tulsa NAACP Drive

As usual, black Oklahomans had a solution. Amos T. Hall, president of the Tulsa Branch of the NAACP and the Northeastern Region of the State Conference of Branches, NAACP Attorney, and former wartime employment advocate had a plan. In addition to his NAACP work, Hall also had deep involvement with the Prince Hall Masons. He planned to solve the financial woes of the Legal Defense Fund by linking it with the Prince Hall Masons. The Masons were, perhaps, even more entrenched in Oklahoma than the NAACP. In the 1940s there were the over 125 lodges throughout the state.³⁷²

Hall served as the Grand Master of the Oklahoma Prince Hall Masons for 31 years and National President of the Grand Masters Council for 18 years. He planned to induct Thurgood Marshall into the Coal Creek lodge in Tulsa so that Masons nationwide could then funnel money to the Legal Defense Fund as it would not be headed by a Mason. As early as 1945, Dunjee used the prospect of Mason donations to prompt Marshall and the NAACP to take up the *Sipuel* case. The editor told Marshall that there was an important fraternity in Tulsa that wanted to donate substantial funds to the case but would not do so until the case had been filed. Jimmy Stewart, head of the Oklahoma City NAACP, described Hall's plan thusly, "Amos T. Hall . . . came up with another idea to raise money," join the ranks of the Prince Hall Masons. Stewart joined "and so

Failing," *The Oklahoma Eagle*, April 28, 1949; "Revitalizing the NAACP," *The Oklahoma Eagle*, May 5, 1949; "Local NAACP Hold Election," *The Oklahoma Eagle*, June 16, 1949; "Has the NAACP Gotten in a Rut?," *The Oklahoma Eagle*, June 2, 1949 and "Majority of Citizens Fail to Share Financial Load of Five NAACP CASES," *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, September 4, 1948.

³⁷² Johnson, Hannibal B. *Acres of Aspiration: All-Black Towns in Oklahoma*. Fort Worth: Eakin Press, 2002. Kindle, 79-83; Buck Colbert Franklin, *My Life and an Era* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997). Kindle, 110-112, 124, 345; Jimmy Lewis Franklin, *Journey Towards Hope: A History of Black Oklahomans* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), 163; Juan Williams, *Thurgood Marshall: American Revolutionary* (New York: Times Books, 1998). Kindle, 183; "Let's Show Our Appreciation to Attorney Hall," *The Oklahoma Eagle*, November 11, 1948 and "Over 1,000 Prince Hall Masons to Gather Here Sunday, July 3," *The Oklahoma Eagle*, July 2, 1949.

did Thurgood. From then on we got a substantial contribution from the Masons.”³⁷³ The exact date of Marshall and Stewart’s admission to the Prince Hall Masons is unknown, but Marshall began being listed as a member of Tulsa’s Coal Creek Lodge #88 in 1947, just as the Oklahoma State Conference of Branches began to fade.

The contributions from Prince Hall Masonic lodges and temples across the nation, under the guidance of Amos T. Hall, president of the Grand Masters Council, were indeed substantial. Without them, according to Thurgood Marshall, successful cases like *Brown v. Board of Education*, (1954) would not have been possible. Historical records do not show a total dollar amount donated by the Prince Hall Masons after Marshall joined. The incomplete records available still paint a remarkable picture. For the funding of the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, the Grand Lodges of Louisiana donated \$32,000 in the early 1950s. In 1954, the Prince Hall Masons’ Legal Research Department began operation within the NAACP. The fruition of Hall’s idea allowed the organization to directly control funds raised by the Masons for educational reform. In 1958, the fund raised over \$142,000 alone. Historian Larry S. Gibson has currently identified donations of over \$400,000 from lodges across the United States in the 1950s.³⁷⁴ Following Hall’s bringing Marshall into the Prince Hall Masons in Oklahoma, the

³⁷³ “Let’s Show Our Appreciation to Attorney Hall,” *The Oklahoma Eagle*, November 11, 1948; “Judge Hall Dies Of Heart Attack,” *The Oklahoma Eagle*, November 18, 1971; “Jimmy Says: He Walked The Lonely Road As Servant To All,” *The Oklahoma Eagle*, November 18, 1971; “Mourns Passing Of Hall,” *The Oklahoma Eagle*, November 25, 1971; “Annual Conference of Grand Masters Met At Atlanta,” *The Oklahoma Eagle*, May 26, 1949; Thompson, “Little Caesar of Civil Rights,” 139; Williams, *Thurgood Marshall*, 183; Minnie Finch, *The NAACP: Its Fight for Justice* (Metuchen: New Jersey: Scarecrow Press Inc, 1987), 127-128 and *Masonry Today*, “Today in Masonic History: Thurgood Marshall is Born,” https://www.masonrytoday.com/index.php?new_month=7&new_day=2&new_year=2016_ (accessed July 31, 2021).

³⁷⁴ Larry S. Gibson, “America’s Oldest Civil Rights Organization: The Prince Hall Masons,” May 28, 2020, <https://afro.com/americas-oldest-civil-rights-organization-the-prince-hall-masons> (accessed July 31, 2021); Joseph

fraternity became synonymous with the NAACP and education integration fights. The fraternal order was so associated with the NAACP and education integration fights in 1950 that the Oklahoma City NAACP branch had to release the following statement:

“Because of the many inquiries that have come to my office wherein the persons seeking information seemed to feel that the Civil Rights division of the Prince Hall Masons is an auxiliary of the State Conference of Branches, NAACP, I desire to state that the two organizations have no organic relationship whatever.³⁷⁵”

By initiating Thurgood Marshall into the Prince Hall Masons and formally linking the fraternal organization’s educational donations to the NAACP’s Legal Defense fund, Race Massacre survivor Amos T. Hall, cemented the Oklahoma State Conference of Branches’ legacy as one of, if not the most, consequential NAACP groups in the history of the organization. It also secured the legacy of the FEPC as a crucial, if unrecognized, place in the civil rights history of America. When the FEPC is judged based on its original goals to prevent a World War I home front repeat, to gain jobs and economic opportunities for blacks, and to lay the foundation for future civil rights victories, the committee, though imperfect, unequivocally worked.

A. Walkes, Jr., and Paul M. Bessel, “A Freemason Who Changed Our Country: Thurgood Marshall,” [\(thurgood.pdf \(bessel.org\)\)](http://thurgood.pdf(bessel.org)) (accessed July 31, 2021); Ann Seymour, *American Heritage* (digital), Volume 65, Issue 6, October 2020 <https://www.americanheritage.com/secret-history-prince-hall-freemasonry#1> (accessed July 31, 2021); Public Broadcast Service (PBS), “The Long Road to Brown: Full History,” <https://www.pbs.org/beyondbrown/history/fullhistory.html> (accessed July 31, 2021) and William Muraskin, *Middle Class Blacks in a White Society: Prince Hall Freemasonry in America*. Berkeley: University of California Press 1975. 230; Theda, Skocpol, Ariane Liazos and Marshall Ganz, “Black Fraternalisms and the Mid-Twentieth-Century Movement for Civil Rights,” in *Black Fraternalists and the Mid-Twentieth-Century Movement for Civil Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 176-178 and “1,200 In Attendance At Boley Grand Lodge Meeting,” *The Oklahoma Eagle*, August 12, 1948.

³⁷⁵ “Williamston Plans 1950 NAACP Drive,” *Oklahoma City Black Dispatch*, February 11, 1950.

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