

“For Democracy and a Caste System”?
Civil Rights, World War II, and Public Opinion

Steven White*

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Abstract This paper explores public opinion about race relations and civil rights in the latter years and aftermath of World War II. While political scientists and historians have documented and contested the war’s impact on American institutions – and how this shaped the nature of political activism and legislative accomplishments later on – the contemporaneous relationship between the war and civil rights in mass public opinion has not been similarly studied. By analyzing underutilized public opinion surveys from this period, I demonstrate that whites in the 1940s did not generally see a tension between a war directed largely at a fascist regime and the maintenance of white supremacy at home. I also attempt to assess whether white veterans were liberalized on civil rights issues, both in the years immediately after the war and into the early 1960s. I find mixed evidence on this question, with variation by survey question and in the effects of region.

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Introduction

“I’ve changed my ideas a lot about colored people since I got into this war and so have a lot of other boys from the South.”

—Lt. Van T. Barfoot¹

“I went into the Army a nigger; I’m comin’ out a *man*.”

—Anonymous black veteran²

“Up until George went into the army he was a good nigger. But when he came out, they thought they were as good as any white people.”

—One of black veteran George Dorsey’s murderers³

“I was still just a nigger. Not an American soldier anymore. Just a nigger.”

—Staff Sergeant Ben Fielder, returning to Mississippi after the war⁴

These conflicting sentiments illustrate the complexity of World War II’s implications for civil rights and America’s racial order. In this paper, I analyze underutilized public opinion surveys from the 1940s to provide an initial assessment of the contemporaneous relationship between the war and domestic race relations in American public opinion. I also briefly examine later surveys to explore the effect of service in the war on white veterans in the years immediately preceding the height of the civil rights movement. Initial results are suggestive of a few trends. In general, whites in the mass public – especially the southern mass public – did not see a tension between the logic of war and the existence of white supremacy at home. African Americans of course felt quite differently. In comparing opinion on federal intervention in state lynching cases specifically, there is some evidence the war heightened southern resistance. The effects of white military service are more difficult to tease out, but there is some suggestion in the data that northern whites were more likely to be liberalized by the war than southern ones.

The paper proceeds as follows. I first review some relevant academic literature on the relationship between military service and minority rights, the effect of war on the American state, and

¹James C. Cobb, “World War II and the Mind of the Modern South,” *Remaking Dixie: The Impact of World War II on the American South*, ed: Neil R. McMillen, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997, 6.

²Philip A. Klinkner with Rogers M. Smith, *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999, 201.

³Cobb, “World War II and the Mind of the Modern South,” 7.

⁴Jason Sokol, *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945-1975*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006, 24.

debates about the cause and timing of the civil rights realignment between the parties. I next provide some historical background information about how World War II affected American society, its influence on black activism, and its potentially mixed effect on white attitudes. I then describe the datasets used in the paper, explain important methodological decisions, and present the results of my statistical analysis in three subsections: snapshots of attitudes on race in the latter years and immediate aftermath of the war, a comparison of white attitudes on federal intervention in state lynching cases before and after the war, and a look at white veterans' attitudes on segregation in 1961 to consider the impact further down the line. Finally, I discuss the implications of my results and conclude by reflecting on potential limitations inherent to the project.

Literature Review

This project takes a behavioral approach to the study of historical political development, similar – at least in part – to Christopher Parker's *Fighting for Democracy*. Parker uses survey data from the 1960s and newly conducted interviews with black veterans of World War II and Korea to argue black veterans' willingness to challenge white supremacy and Jim Crow was significantly shaped by their military service.⁵ While Parker's book offers many insights on the effects of war on the successes of the civil rights movement, it also leaves some interesting questions unaddressed. First, Parker's analysis ignores public opinion surveys from the time of war itself, relying instead on data collected sometimes decades after the transformative period of military service. And second, his work leaves open the question of why the war might not have also had significant ramifications on white attitudes and political behavior as well. For example, he argues that “we should expect black Southerners who were exposed to different, more egalitarian cultures to have begun an aggressive interrogation of white supremacy.”⁶ Yet he leaves unanswered the question of why this should not also be true for whites who experienced these same “more egalitarian cultures.”

Other researchers have explored the relationship between military service and minority incorporation more generally. Ronald Krebs attempts to isolate the conditions under which participation in

⁵Christopher S. Parker, *Fighting for Democracy: Black Veterans and the Struggle Against White Supremacy in the Postwar South*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

⁶*Ibid.*, 95.

the armed forces transforms political communities. More specifically, he asks the question: “Under what conditions and how does military service shape the nature and outcome of minorities’ struggles for effective citizenship?”⁷ Krebs considers three mechanisms through which such military service might have such an effect: socialization, contact, and elite formation/transformation. This paper is primarily concerned with the mass public and, thus, the first two. Krebs points out potential flaws in assuming such processes take place. Both tend to view soldiers as passive receivers, “but cultural systems always contain enough contradictory material so that individuals can challenge hegemonic projects”⁸ – attachments to white supremacy, for example. Similarly, the messages that do get absorbed by soldiers do not necessarily transfer automatically to non-military contexts. “[I]dentity is highly contextual,” he writes, “and one should not be surprised to see soldiers adopting regional, class, gendered, religious, or ethnic perspectives when they are off base or out of uniform or when they have returned to civilian life.”⁹

This project also engages with work on the effects of war on the American state. As Philip Klinkner points out, “Scholars of comparative politics and international relations have long been aware of the importance of war to state development, but only recently have scholars of American politics come to the same conclusion.”¹⁰ A particularly relevant example of this to the topic at hand is Daniel Kryder’s work on race and the American state in World War II.¹¹ Yet, as Daniel Carpenter points out, the influence of state-centered approaches has had certain drawbacks. In a mostly favorable assessment of the influence of Stephen Skowronek’s *Building a New American State* on research in American Political Development, Daniel Carpenter notes a few “regrettable features to *Building’s* topical legacy,” most notably for my purposes here that “scholars have consistently analyzed institutions at the expense of emergent patterns of citizen behavior and organization.”¹²

⁷Ronald R. Krebs, *Fighting for Rights: Military Service and the Politics of Citizenship*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006, 2-3.

⁸Krebs, *Fighting for Rights*, 8.

⁹Ibid., 9.

¹⁰Philip A. Klinkner, Review of *Divided Arsenal: Race and the American State*, *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 95, No. 3, September 2001, 735. For the classic statement of how “war made states,” see Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1992*, Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995.

¹¹Daniel Kryder, *Divided Arsenal: Race and the American State During World War II*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

¹²Daniel P. Carpenter, “The Multiple and Material Legacies of Stephen Skowronek,” *Social Science History*, Vol. 27, No. 3, Fall 2003, 467.

This project seeks to at least partially address this by considering the mass behavioral underpinnings of a subject more commonly addressed by the methods of historical institutionalism.

Finally, I view this project as tackling one small aspect of a larger debate about the cause and timing of the civil rights realignment between the Democratic and Republican parties. As Brian Feinstein and Eric Schickler write:

Sometime between the late nineteenth century and the passage of the major civil rights acts of the 1960s, the two major parties essentially switched positions on civil rights issues. While there is a scholarly consensus on this very general statement, once one moves to more specific claims concerning the causes, timing and sequence of this shift, the consensus quickly erodes.¹³

John Aldrich aptly describes political parties as “the most highly endogenous institutions of any substantial and sustained political importance in American history.”¹⁴ There are few better illustrations of this than the processes underlying the civil rights issue realignment. The most dominant and widely accepted theoretical framework for understanding the shift is the issue evolution model proposed by Edward Carmines and James Stimson. Carmines and Stimson offer a top-down portrayal of issue realignment and identify 1963/1964 as a critical juncture in the shift of racial conservatism away from the Democratic Party and into the Republican Party.¹⁵ While it has received occasional critique,¹⁶ its influence has persevered in academic discourse. However, the issue evolution model has come under a new critique in a recent article by Brian Feinstein and Eric Schickler. They study state party platforms outside the South, as well as congressional rhetoric, and find evidence of increased civil rights liberalism on the part of northern Democrats as early as the mid-1940s. They also recast the direction of change: from the bottom-up instead of from the top-down.¹⁷

Within this broader debate about civil rights issue realignment, several potential avenues of

¹³Brian D. Feinstein and Eric Schickler, “Platforms and Partners: The Civil Rights Realignment Reconsidered,” *Studies in American Political Development*, Vol. 22, Spring 2008, 1.

¹⁴John A. Aldrich, *Why Parties?: The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995, 19.

¹⁵Edward G. Carmines and James A. Stimson, *Issue Evolution: Race and the Transformation of American Politics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.

¹⁶Alan I. Abramowitz, “Issue Evolution Reconsidered: Racial Attitudes and Partisanship in the U.S. Electorate,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 38, No. 1, February 1994, 1-24.

¹⁷Feinstein and Schickler, “Platforms and Partners.”

closer research present themselves. Eric Schickler, for example, is examining public opinion and the New Deal policy agenda, building on work in American Political Development about the role of the southern veto in Congress in limiting liberalism during the New Deal and Fair Deal.¹⁸ This paper locates itself similarly. While this part of my project is the least developed currently, the broader change in the party system related to race is very much at the background of the analysis.

Historical Background

War and social, political, and economic change

World War II shaped American society drastically. About 16 million Americans served in the war, more than the combined total of all U.S. wars until that time.¹⁹ The national budget was also affected: In 1939, the national government spent \$1.1 billion on national defense; just two years later, this number increased to over \$6 billion. And in 1940, the American government instituted the first peacetime draft in the nation's history.²⁰

The South was particularly influenced by the war. Eight of the nine army training centers with capacities for 50,000 or more military personnel were located there. The war also coincided with dramatic shifts to the demographic makeup and political economy of the region. In 1940, 77 percent of all African Americans lived in the South, with half of southern blacks living in rural areas. Employment in agriculture was 73 percent above the national average and per capita income 40 percent below it. The region was “considerably poorer, blacker, and more rural than any other part of the United States,” as Morton Sosna puts it. Over the course of the war, 1.6 million civilians migrated out of the South. The rural population declined by nearly 3.5 million, bringing it to about 7 million total – less than half what it had been before the Great Depression started the trend.

¹⁸Eric Schickler, “Public Opinion, the Congressional Policy Agenda, and the Limits of New Deal Liberalism, 1935-1945,” 2009, unpublished working paper; Ira Katznelson, Kim Geiger, and Daniel Kryder, “Limiting Liberalism: The Southern Veto in Congress, 1933-1950,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 108, 1993, 283-306; Sean Farhang and Ira Katznelson, “The Southern Imposition: Congress and Labor in the New Deal and Fair Deal,” *Studies in American Political Development*, Vol. 19, April 2005, 1-30. For a much earlier statement of the Democratic Party’s “anomalous position of being a party of ‘liberalism,’ whose achievements are subject to veto by a reactionary faction,” see Richard Hofstadter, “From Calhoun to the Dixicrats,” *Social Research*, Vol. 16, June 1949, 150.

¹⁹Morton Sosna, “Introduction,” *Remaking Dixie*, xvi.

²⁰Klinkner and Smith, 147-148.

African Americans accounted for about two-thirds of migration out of the South, as well as half of the intraregional movement from the rural South to its urban centers. By the war's end, the black rural population dropped by 30 percent and the share of the national black population living in the region fell to 68 percent. Military service had a particularly strong influence on migration for young black veterans. Over half of black men in their twenties during their service lived in a different region by 1950, compared to a third of nonveteran black men and a quarter of white veterans in that age group. Economically, changes were similarly vast. As Dillard Lasseter of the War Manpower Commission in Atlanta declared in 1944, "Due to conditions arising out of the war, the South has undergone more economic changes in two years than in any previous fifty."²¹

World War II also coincided with important shifts in the federal government's approach to civil rights abuses, especially in the Department of Justice. In April 1941, the Supreme Court decided *Mitchell v. United States* in favor of a black congressman against the Interstate Commerce Commission. The case marked the first time the DOJ had ever submitted an *amicus curiae* brief on behalf of a black defendant.²² And while 3,842 documented lynchings occurred between 1889 and 1941, the January 1942 federal investigation of the lynching of Cleo Wright in Sikeston, Missouri, marked the first time the DOJ became directly involved in a state lynching case. Coming just a month after the attack on Pearl Harbor, it is probably no coincidence that the details of the lynching – Wright was seized by a mob of 600 whites, dragged through a black neighborhood tied to a car, and set on fire – were spread around the world by Axis propagandists.²³

Although the revolution in political participation caused by the Voting Rights Act occurred some two decades later, the percentage of southern blacks registered to vote quadrupled between

²¹Sosna, xiv-xvi; Pete Daniel, "Going among Strangers: Southern Reactions to World War II," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 77, No. 3, December 1990, 886; Dillard B. Lasseter, "The Impact of the War on the South and Implications for Postwar Developments," *Social Forces*, Vol. 23, No. 1, October 1944, 20; John Modell, Marc Goulden, and Sigurdur Magnusson, "World War II in the Lives of Black Americans: Some Findings and Interpretation," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 76, No. 3, December 1989, 839. As Pete Daniel describes it, "In the South then, the war planted seeds that hastened the development of a new agricultural structure, intensified urbanization, and launched a civil rights movement. The war, more than the New Deal, ended hard times for many southerners, and during the war the role of the federal government, enlarged to fight depression, expanded and became ever more critical in reshaping southern culture." Daniel, "Southern Reactions to World War II," 887.

²²Kevin J. McMahon, *Reconsidering Roosevelt on Race: How the Presidency Paved the Road to Brown*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004, 2.

²³Klinkner and Smith, 173; Lee Finkle, "The Conservative Aims of Militant Rhetoric: Black Protest during World War II," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 60, No. 3, December 1973, 700.

1940 and 1947, from 3 percent to 12 percent.²⁴ Legislative accomplishments like the Soldier Vote Act represented the beginnings of change. “The equilibrium in voting laws was decisively disrupted by World War II,” according to Alexander Keyssar.²⁵

The war and black political activism

The experience of war had a significant impact on the nature of black activism. World War II was preceded by two decades of “organizational activity and institution building, which provided a means of translating the rhetoric, limited reforms, and slim political openings created by the war for democracy into action,” writes Kimberly Johnson.²⁶ “[T]he hysterical cries of the preachers of democracy for Europe leave us cold,” an editorial in the NAACP’s *Crisis* proclaimed. “We want democracy in Alabama, Arkansas, in Mississippi and Michigan, in the District of Columbia – in the *Senate of the United States*.”²⁷ For external factors to the civil rights movement – like international political pressures – “processes internal to the movement contributed to the favorable effect they had on the structure of black political opportunities during the period in question,” according to Doug McAdam.²⁸ It was not just the exogenous shock of war, in other words, that magically transformed the abilities of civil rights activists. Rather, it was processes endogenous to these groups that directed the war’s impact.

Black newspapers played a significant role in relating the international goals of war to the domestic goal of civil rights. The *Pittsburgh Courier* advocated a Double V campaign – victory at home and abroad – while the *Chicago Defender* sought to commemorate the lynching of Wright by urging readers, “Remember Pearl Harbor and Sikeston, too.”²⁹ A black activist from California

²⁴Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States*, New York: Basic Books, 2000, 249.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 244. For discussion of the Soldier Vote Act, see Klinkner and Smith, *The Unsteady March*, 174. Of course, this was not without southern resistance. In the lead-up to war, Mississippi even passed a law requiring textbooks in black schools to exclude all references to voting, elections, and democracy. Richard M. Dalfume, “The ‘Forgotten Years’ of the Negro Revolution,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 55, No. 1, January 1968, 92.

²⁶Kimberly S. Johnson, “Jim Crow reform and the democratization of the south,” *Race and American Political Development*, eds. Joseph Lowndes, Julie Novkov, and Dorian T. Warren, New York: Routledge, 2008, 167.

²⁷Klinkner and Smith, *The Unsteady March*, 148.

²⁸Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency 1930-1970: Second Edition*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999 [1982], 271n.

²⁹Neil A. Wynn, *The Afro-American and the Second World War: Revised Edition*, New York: Holmes & Meier, 1993 [1976], 100.

summed up this attitude when he declared, “As long as I have two arms, I will use one to fight for my country and the other to fight for my race.”³⁰ Wartime saw major increases in the strength of black political and civic organizations. Membership in the NAACP, for example, increased ten-fold during the war.³¹

Many white elites were left disconcerted. John Temple Graves wrote in 1942, “[T]hey have invited their followers to think in terms of a Double V-for-Victory – victory in battle with Hitler and victory in battle at home. Victory, unhappily, doesn’t work that way.” Later in the same article, while detailing improvements in the conditions of black southerners during the war, he notes the decline of lynchings, but warns, “Unhappily the number may increase now as a result of the agitations of the white man against the black and the black against the white.”³² Some racial conservatives at the time feared the potential mobilizing effects of the war. Joseph Lowndes, in describing how national conservative intellectuals in the postwar period rationalized southern racism, notes how one central figure, Charles Wallace Collins, understood the potential effects of World War II on race relations in America. In Wallace’s 1947 book *Whither Solid South?*, he describes how the war “offered the opportunity for the rationalization of the position of the Negro as a citizen of the United States in a time of war.”³³ For many like Collins, this was not a welcomed development.

White attitudes: anti-racist crusade or affirmation of the racial status quo?

For some whites, the logic of the war conflicted with continued toleration of a white supremacist enclave in the South. “We cannot fight fascism abroad while turning a blind eye to fascism at home,” declared *The Nation*. “We cannot inscribe our banner ‘For democracy and a caste system.’

³⁰Krebs, *Fighting for Rights*, 151.

³¹Harvard Sitkoff, “Racial Militancy and Interracial Violence in the Second World War,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 58, No. 3, December 1971, 663.

³²John Temple Graves, “The Southern Negro and the War Crisis,” *Virginia Quarterly Review*, Vol. 18, No. 4, Fall 1942, 501, 514. *Time Magazine* described Graves as a “round-faced, goggle-eyed Georgian...stoutly in favor of Southern chivalry, Birmingham-made steel, free enterprise, John Temple Graves II and segregation of Negroes.” In “The Press: Mr. Graves Takes a Walk,” *Time Magazine*, March 1946, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,801771,00.html>.

³³Quoted in Joseph Lowndes, *From the New Deal to the New Right: Race and the Southern Origins of Modern Conservatism*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008, 22.

³⁴ In his comparative analysis of race policy, Robert Lieberman writes, “In the war, the United States was allied with Britain and France against a totalitarian regime defined by its racism, and in mobilizing their populations for the war they invoked principles of antiracist liberalism and inclusion that held out the promise of racial equality.”³⁵ War against the Nazis seemed to require a fundamental rethinking of racial injustice domestically.

Some contemporaneous academic literature supports this perspective for the white mass public. University of North Carolina sociologist Howard Odum, writing in 1948, described “a relatively large number of young college students and returning G.I.’s advocating a more liberal practice with reference to race relations” in the white South.³⁶ Similarly, in 1943’s *To Stem this Tide: A Survey of Racial Tension Areas in the United States*, Charles Johnson and his associate shared an anecdote from Evansville, Indiana, where a train conductor ordered a group of white and black soldiers from the same town to separate but a white soldier refused the order and threatened to “fight[] the entire train crew.”³⁷

More famous was Gunnar Myrdal’s 1944 book *An American Dilemma*, described by Alan Brinkley as a “major factor in drawing white liberal attention to problems of race – precisely because Myrdal himself discussed racial injustice as a rebuke to the nation’s increasingly vocal claim to be the defender of democracy and personal freedom in a world menaced by totalitarianism.”³⁸ Although it received some scattered criticism,³⁹ the nature of the book – its social scientific language, non-partisan sponsorship, massive length, Myrdal’s European-ness – lead it to seem like a “definitive analysis” of the American race problem in elite discourse.⁴⁰ Myrdal saw American race relations as being central to the war effort:

³⁴Maria Hohn, “‘We Will Never Go Back to the Old Way Again’: Germany in the African-American Debate on Civil Rights,” *Central European History*, Vol. 41, 2008, 616.

³⁵Robert C. Lieberman, *Shaping Race Policy: The United States in Comparative Perspective*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, 75

³⁶Howard W. Odum, “Social Change in the South”, *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 10, No. 2, May 1948, 244.

³⁷Charles S. Johnson and Associates, *To Stem this Tide: A Survey of Racial Tension Areas in the United States*, New York: AMS Press, 1943, 38.

³⁸Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War*, New York: Vintage Books, 1995, 168-169

³⁹See, for example, Leo P. Crespi, “Is Gunnar Myrdal on the Right Track?” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 2, Summer 1945, 201-212.

⁴⁰Brinkley, *The End of Reform*, 169-170

This War is an ideological war fought in defense of democracy. The totalitarian dictatorships in the enemy countries had even made the ideological issue much sharper in this War than it was in the First World War. Moreover, in this War the principle of democracy had to be applied more explicitly to race. Fascism and nazism are based on a racial superiority dogma – not unlike the old hackneyed American caste theory – and they came to power by means of racial persecution and oppression. In fighting fascism and nazism, America had to stand before the whole world in favor of racial tolerance and the inalienable human freedoms.⁴¹

Yet U.S. public opinion might not have matched Myrdal’s assessment. Kryder argues directly that Americans were “less familiar with the aims of the war and their relationship to democratic ideals than Myrdal believed.”⁴² And as Jason Sokol points out, many white veterans after the war simply wanted to return home and resume life exactly as they had left it. “That often meant supporting Jim Crow as staunchly as ever,” he writes. “Many believed they had fought to defend, not overturn, racial customs.”⁴³ It is far from clear, then, that white soldiers themselves felt the transformative power of the antifascist crusade on their own racial attitudes.

So on the one hand, as Brinkley describes it, “The war helped draw growing numbers of white liberals, most of whom had slighted the issue during the 1930s, toward a commitment to fighting racial injustice; and it greatly strengthened the determination of African Americans themselves to demand their rights.”⁴⁴ But on the other hand, some historical evidence suggests many whites in the mass public – especially the southern mass public – were not similarly affected by the logic of antifascism. Many were more inclined to view the war as a defense of America – *their* America, with its racial order intact – than an ideological war against racism. In this paper, I examine the available survey evidence to assess whether this is the case.

⁴¹Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, Vol. 2, New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1944, 1004. Later, Myrdal quotes the novelist Pearl S. Buck (“that good American who has acquired such a rare understanding for the Asiatic people’s mind) on just this point. “Every lynching, every race riot, gives joy to Japan. The discriminations of the American army and navy and the air forces against colored soldiers and sailors, the exclusion of colored labor in our defense industries and trade unions, all our social discriminations, are of the greatest aid today to our enemy in Asia, Japan. ‘Look at America,’ Japan is saying to millions of listening ears. ‘Will white Americans give you equality?’ ” *Ibid.*, 1016.

⁴²Kryder, *Divided Arsenal*, 10.

⁴³Sokol, *There Goes My Everything*, 20, 23.

⁴⁴Brinkley, *The End of Reform*, 138.

Data and Methods

Defining the southern region

The first methodological question in the study of the South in American national politics is how to define the region. The South can be justifiably defined in a number of ways:

- The eleven states of the former Confederacy: AL, AR, FL GA, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, TX, and VA.⁴⁵
- The former Confederate states plus KY and OK. This definition was used in New Deal documents like the U.S. National Emergency Council’s *Report on Economic Conditions of the South*; it is also used by *The Congressional Quarterly Almanac* and, thus, many studies focused on Congress.⁴⁶
- The former confederate states plus DE, KY, MD, MO, OK, and WV. These are the states that mandated school segregation before *Brown v. Board of Education*.⁴⁷
- A combination of three official U.S. Census divisions: South Atlantic (DE, DC, FL, GA, MD, NC, SC, VA, and WV), East South Central (AL, KY, MS, and TN), and West South Central (AR, LA, OK, and TX).⁴⁸

Unfortunately, the datasets I’m using prevent me from maintaining a consistent definition of the region. For the first part of the analysis, I use the last definition mostly as a matter of convenience: many of the surveys do not offer state-by-state breakdowns but only regional ones based on Census divisions. While this is not ideal, it can only bias southern distinctiveness downward, not upward. In other words, if the South appears distinct using this rather expansive definition, it is almost certainly the case that just using the eleven former Confederate states would show greater statistical

⁴⁵The classic example is of course V. O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006 [1949]; for a more recent example, see Robert Mickey, “The Beginning of the End for Authoritarian Rule in America: *Smith v. Allwright* and the Abolition of the White Primary in the Deep South, 1944-1949,” *Studies in American Political Development*, Vol. 22, Fall 2008, 143-182.

⁴⁶See Katznelson et al., “Limiting Liberalism.”

⁴⁷See Farhang and Katznelson, “The Southern Imposition.”

⁴⁸“Census Regions and Divisions of the United States,” www.census.gov/geo/www/us_regdiv.pdf.

and substantive significance. Substantively, it is similar to the definition used by Farhang and Katznelson, but exchanging Maryland for the District of Columbia.

In subsection two, I do have state-level identification of respondents, so I can use the V. O. Key, Confederate-states definition of the South. However, because the broader Census definition is used in part one, I report results from both regional definitions to maintain some consistency and make note of relevant differences in interpretation.

The survey used in subsection three is not a national survey, but a sample of the former Confederate states. As such, I am forced to use that definition and unfortunately cannot compare results to what might be obtained using the Census definition.

Description of public opinion surveys

Most of the surveys used in this paper are from the 1930s and 1940s. These datasets are not often used in contemporary political science research, despite the plethora of theoretically interesting questions they are applicable to.⁴⁹ Of course, one of the main reasons the datasets are rarely used is due to the quota sampling procedures employed at the time, “long since viewed as shoddy and unrepresentative,” according to Philip Converse.⁵⁰ More recently, Adam Berinsky has proposed a weighting methodology to correct for some of the known biases of this early survey data.⁵¹ Along with Eric Schickler, he is working to create a new database containing “corrected” versions of these old datasets.⁵² However, these revised datasets are not yet publicly available.

I therefore utilize the raw data. While there are clear methodological limitations to this choice, I believe the choice is justifiable, at least for now. My theoretical interest lends itself to correlational

⁴⁹Some exceptions include Robert S. Erikson, “The Relationship Between Public Opinion and State Policy: A New Look Based on Some Forgotten Data,” *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 20, No. 1, February 1976, 25-36; Gregory A. Caldeira, “Public Opinion and the U.S. Supreme Court: FDR’s Court-Packing Plan,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 81, No. 4, December 1987, 139-1153; Benjamin I. Page and Robert Y. Shapiro, *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans’ Policy Preferences*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992); Stephen M. Weatherford and Boris Sergeev, “Thinking About Economic Interests: Class and Recession in the New Deal,” *Political Behavior*, Vol. 22, No. 4, December 2000, 311-339; Matthew A. Baum and Samuel Kernell, “Economic Class and Popular Support for Franklin Roosevelt in War and Peace,” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 65, 2001. 198-229.

⁵⁰Philip E. Converse, “Second Comment,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 9, 1965, 331.

⁵¹Adam J. Berinsky, “American Public Opinion in the 1930s and 1940s: The Analysis of Quota-Controlled Sample Survey Data,” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 70, No. 4, Winter 2006, 499-529.

⁵²Adam Berinsky and Eric Schickler, “Collaborative Research: The American Mass Public in The 1930s and 1940s,” NSF Grant, <http://web.mit.edu/berinsky/www/files/nsf.pdf>.

and multivariate analysis. Weighting is somewhat less essential for these methods, whereas drawing inference from a raw cross-tabulation would be completely misleading without proper weights in place. I hope to later utilize the method proposed by Berinsky to see whether it provides different results (it remains an open question whether such a weighting method will lead to interpretations that are substantively different than working with the raw data). I discuss the possible limits on drawing inference from the data in the conclusion.

In part one of my analysis, I use four public opinion surveys from 1943-1948. Datasets were obtained from the iPOLL Databank provided by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at the University of Connecticut.⁵³ I first analyze “NORC Survey: Postwar Problems, Old Age Pension, Public Schools and Free Speech” from the National Opinion Research Center. This survey has a sample size of 2,560 national adults who were interviewed face to face in November 1943. The dependent variable is a question asking, “Do you think negroes have the same chance as white people to make a good living in this country?” The variable is dichotomized so that 1 = yes and 0 = no and a logit model is employed. Independent variables are region, race, self-reported vote for president in the 1940 election, age, gender, and education.

Second, I use “NORC Survey # 1944-0225: Attitudes Toward Negroes,” also from NORC. The sample size is 2,521 national white adults who were interviewed face to face in May 1944. The dependent variable is a question asking, “After the war, do you expect Negroes and white people to get along with each other better, or not as well as they did before the war?” The variable is coded so that 1 = not as well, 2 = same, and 3 = better and I use OLS regression. This requires dropping the don’t know category, which comprises 14 percent of the sample. It is possible the uncertainty of these respondents might be telling, but I opt to drop them and use the simpler OLS regression technique instead of something like multinomial logit that would allow for comparisons across unordered categories but carries other stronger assumptions. Independent variables are region, self-reported vote for president in the 1940 election, gender, age, and education. Since only whites were sampled, race is already “controlled for” by default.

The third dataset in this paper is “NORC Survey: Minorities; United Nations,” again from

⁵³iPoll Databank, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html.

NORC. The sample size is 2,589 national adults who were interviewed face to face in May 1946. The dependent variable is a question asking, “Do YOU think most Negroes in the United States are being treated fairly or unfairly?,” where 1 = fairly and 0 = unfairly. A logit specification is again used. Independent variables are region, race, gender, age, and education. I additionally include another highly theoretically relevant independent variable: whether or not the respondent is a World War II veteran. I can thus test whether the experience of serving in the war has an effect on racial attitudes directly.

Finally, I use “Roper Fortune # 64: Popularity of the Likely Presidential Candidates,” conducted by the Roper Organization and sponsored by *Fortune* magazine. The sample size is 3,621 national adults who were interviewed face to face in August 1948. The dependent variable is a question asking, “Do you think the Republicans would handle the question of [racial and religious minorities in this country], in a different way than the Democrats would, or do you think they would handle it pretty much the same way, or do you think it isn’t clear yet?” I dichotomize the variable so that 1 = differently and 0 = the same way and again use a logit model. Independent variables are region, veteran status, gender, education, and Democratic and Republican partisanship. Unfortunately, only 2 percent of the sample is black, so I consider white respondents only in my analysis. An additional limitation is that the veteran variable is not limited to World War II veterans.

In the second part of my analysis, I analyze surveys from 1937 and 1948 – before the war and in its aftermath – that ask respondents about lynching. These datasets also come from the iPoll Databank. I first analyze “Gallup Poll #137-0106: China and Japan/Automobiles/Finances” from the Gallup Organization. The sample size is 2,858 national adults who were interviewed face to face in December 1937. The dependent variable is a question asking, “Congress is now considering a lynching bill which gives the Federal government power to: Fine and imprison local policemen who are negligent in protecting a prisoner from a lynch mob, and also to Make a county in which a lynching occurs pay a fine up to \$10,000 to the victim of his family. Do you approve of this bill?” I dichotomize the variable so that 1= no and 0 = yes and I use logistic regression. Independent variables are region, gender, urbanity, interviewer-estimated age, and whether the respondent voted

for Roosevelt in 1936 or not. The survey vastly undersamples black respondents (3 percent of the total sample and only 9 black southerners in total, despite a large majority of the black population living in the South at this time). I therefore consider whites only.

The second dataset in this section is “Gallup Poll #1948-0413: Inflation/Business/Presidential Election,” also from the Gallup Organization. The sample size is 3,168 national adults who were interviewed face to face in February 1948. The dependent variable is a question asking, “At present, state governments deal with most crimes committed in their own states. In the case of lynching, do you think the United States (Federal) Government should have the right to step in and deal with the crime – or do you think this should be left entirely to the state government?” I dichotomize the variable so that 1 = left to the state and 0 = federal government should have the right to step in, and I again use logistic regression. Independent variables are region, gender, actual age, whether or not the respondent voted for Roosevelt in 1944, education, and service in World War II. Unfortunately, this survey also undersamples black respondents (4 percent of the total sample), so I again consider whites only.

In the third and final part of my analysis, I move ahead in time and examine the “Negro Political Participation Survey,” a study of black and white southerners – defined as the former Confederate states – conducted in 1961 by principal investigators Donald Matthews and James Prothro at the University of North Carolina. This dataset was obtained from the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) at the University of Michigan.⁵⁴ This survey uses the more modern NES sample design. Thus, while it is limited by the lack of a northern control group, it does not face the limitations of the quota controlled samples used in the previous surveys. The dependent variable is a question asking, “Are you in favor of integration, strict segregation, or something in between?” The variable is coded so that 1 = integration, 2 = something in between, and 3 = strict segregation and I use OLS regression. Independent variables are veteran status, age, Democratic partisanship, gender, union membership, and education.

Outdated racial terms like “Negro” are used in quotations of primary material – survey questions, in this case – but I use “black” and “African American” interchangeably in presenting and

⁵⁴ICPSR Website, “<http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/>.”

discussing my results.⁵⁵ Tables are presented in the appendix.

Preliminary Statistical Analysis

Race in the latter years and aftermath of war: 1943-1948

I begin with the November 1943 survey question asking whether respondents “think negroes have the same chance as white people to make a good living in this country.” Although veteran status is not available in the dataset, the question helps to set the groundwork for an understanding of how demographic categories and partisan politics shaped racial attitudes in the latter years of World War II. Descriptively, [cross-tabs will be discussed here]

Table 1 presents the marginal effects of three logit models.⁵⁶ A parsimonious model using only region and race as explanatory variables shows the marginal effect of being from the South is a 17 percent increase in the probability of agreeing that African Americans have the same chance to make a good living, while the marginal effect of being black is a 41 percent decrease in probability. The second model adds in 1940 presidential vote choice to see whether support for President Roosevelt is associated with racial attitudes. With region and race controlled for, it is not statistically or substantively significant. The third model includes the other control variables: age, gender, and education. Educational attainment has a substantively significant impact, especially college education: The marginal effect of having gone to college is a 23 percent decrease in the probability of agreeing that African Americans have the same chance to make a good living. The marginal effects of region and race are robust in the presence of controls, with the coefficient on South staying the same but the probability associated with being black rising two points to 43 percent.

From this analysis, a few initial findings stick out. Expectedly, there is a substantively significant effect of being from the South. Similarly expected is the effect of being black. It is quite obvious

⁵⁵Here I follow the lead of Kryder, *Divided Arsenal*, xv: “The terms ‘Negro’ and ‘Colored’ are used only in quotations of primary materials; wartime writers did not always capitalize the words, and their original form is retained.” None of the survey questions used in this paper use the term “Colored,” although many of the codebooks use the term in listing racial categories for respondents.

⁵⁶Throughout this paper, marginal effects are the estimated change in probability when all other variables are held at their means.

to think African Americans in 1943 were much less optimistic than whites about racial equality, but the quantification – a 43 percent decrease in the probability of agreeing – helps to clarify the gap. Interestingly, however, support for Roosevelt does not appear to have an effect, suggesting that at least as late as 1943, demographic categories like region and race shaped racial attitudes much more than partisan sentiments.

I turn next to the May 1944 question asking whether white respondents think blacks and whites will get along better after the war. That the survey question specifically asks respondents to conjecture about the effect of the war on race relations makes it almost unique among available surveys from the time period, although it is unfortunate veteran status is not available.⁵⁷ Descriptively, [cross-tabs will be discussed here]

Table 2 presents the result of a single OLS regression. The regional term has by far the largest substantive effect. On a 3-point scale, just being from the South – and controlling for 1940 presidential vote, gender, age, and education – is associated with a .42 shift downward, a quite significant movement. This finding strengthens the suggestion from the 1943 survey. Region again has a large effect, while the effect of voting for Roosevelt in 1940 is almost nonexistent and not statistically significant. The degree of white southern pessimism on improved race relations after the war is telling. Indeed, perhaps it is better to view this not as pessimism but optimism: many southerners simply did not want to fathom a post-Jim Crow society. A war against a genocidally racist enemy did little to change such attitudes.

Next, I examine the May 1946 question asking respondents whether they “think most Negroes in the United States are being treated fairly or unfairly.” Here, whether the respondent is a World War II veteran was included in the questionnaire and is available in the dataset. Descriptively, 31 percent of non-southern whites think African Americans are treated unfairly, while only 16 percent of whites in the South think so. For black respondents, 88 percent outside the South answered unfairly, while a noticeably smaller 62 percent in the South answered this way.

Table 3 presents the marginal effects of three logit models. A relatively parsimonious model

⁵⁷An April 1947 NORC survey asks, “Do you think the way Negroes are treated in this country has any effect on the attitudes of people in foreign countries toward us?” Unfortunately, while this dataset is available from iPoll, it is missing some questions – including this one.

using only region, race, and World War II veteran status as explanatory variables shows the marginal effect of being from the South is a 17 percent increase in the probability of thinking African Americans are treated fairly, while black respondents are 51 percent less likely to think they are being treated fairly. The change in probability associated with fighting in the war, by contrast, is miniscule and not statistically significant. Model 2 includes an interaction term between region and veteran status to test the hypothesis that southern veterans might have been shaped by the war in unique ways. It is not significant and its inclusion raises the AIC value relative to the first model specification, suggesting a poorer fit. At least for this specific survey question, serving in the war did not lead to more favorable sentiments on civil rights among veterans in general or southern veterans in particular. The third model includes controls for gender, age, and education. The impact of college is substantively significant, associated with a 19 percent decrease in probability. The probabilities associated with region and race are robust, with region staying the same and race increasing slightly to 56 percent.

Finally, I consider the August 1948 question asking respondents if they think Republicans would handle racial and religious minorities differently than the Democrats. Veteran status is again available, although the questionnaire did not specify which war. Descriptively, [cross-tabs will be discussed here]

Table 4 presents the marginal effects of two logit models estimating whether white respondents in 1948 think the Republican Party would handle “racial and religious minorities in this country” differently than Democratic Party. The year is significant because 1948 is when many southern Democrats broke away to form the States’ Rights Democratic Party – the “Dixiecrats” – precisely because the Democratic and Republican nominees were both seen as too liberal on race. The question is significant because it touches on the broader debate mentioned in the literature review about the timing of realignment on civil rights issues between the parties.

Model 1 includes only region and veteran status as explanatory variables. The marginal effect of being from the South is a 19 percent increase in the probability of thinking the parties are different, while the effect of being a veteran is small and insignificant. Model 2 includes controls for gender, age, and partisanship. The only additional significant shift in probability is with Republicans, who

are 7 percent more likely to see a difference. The regional effect is robust, increasing slightly to 20 percent. The experience of serving in the war in itself, by contrast, does not prime veteran respondents to see differences between the parties. As a side note (for now), while this does not offer a solid verdict on the debate between Carmines and Stimson and Feinstein and Schickler, it does suggest that the southern mass public still perceived major differences between the two parties on issues of race as late as 1948, even though southern Democratic Party leaders were ceasing to do so.

There are at least two limitations to this analysis worth discussing. First, the veteran variable captures *any* military service, not just service in World War II. However, 72 percent of veterans in the sample are under age 34, suggesting that the variable mostly captures theoretically relevant military experience. Second, the question used as the dependent variable blends racial and religious minorities together. This is unfortunate and might serve to blur the distinctions many respondents drew between racial and religious groups. While racial minorities at the time meant African Americans for most people, religious minorities were more disparate.⁵⁸ However, one of the inherent downsides to using old public opinion surveys is the necessity of making use of what is available rather than what would be ideal. While the question wording limits inference somewhat, I believe it still mostly measures what I am using it for.

The snapshots of 1940s public opinion provided by these four surveys demonstrate substantial (and expected) regional and racial variation in attitudes. In the two surveys where veteran status is available, I do not find significant effects of military service on assessments of whether African Americans are being treated fairly (in 1946) or whether the parties would handle racial and religious minorities differently (in 1948). I turn next to a (very elementary at this point) attempt at looking more directly at change over time.

Lynching and states' rights: 1937 and 1948

In this subsection, I compare two survey questions about the federal government's role in state lynching cases, one before the war and one after. I first compare statistical models estimated with

⁵⁸Although given that this question was asked just a few years after World War II, it is likely most respondents were more primed to think of Jews in particular than other religious minorities.

each survey. I then look more closely at the 1948 survey, exploring the effect of military service in the war on attitudes toward lynching in the South and outside it.

Descriptively, [cross-tabs in 1937 and 1948]. Since there are so few black respondents in the sample – and, especially, so few southern black respondents – I limit my analysis to whites. Table 5 presents the logit estimates from the models using the Census definition of the South and Table 6 presents the results using the Confederate definition. In both tables, being from the South is positively associated with a states’ rights position on lynching, while voting for Roosevelt in the last election and being part of a younger age cohort are associated with greater support for intervention by the federal government. The significance of vote choice is interesting compared to the non-results for this variable in the preceding subsection. In 1937, being from an urban area is also associated with the federal intervention position [the same variable is not available in 1948, but I might try to approximate it in future analysis]. In 1948, education does not appear to have a statistically significant relationship either way. The 1937 dataset does not include information about respondent education levels.

Table 7 presents the marginal effect of being from the South in the bivariate models where opinion is modeled as a function of region only. When using the Census definition, southern respondents were 15 percent more likely than those outside the region to support the states’ rights position in 1937 and 21 percent more likely to do so in 1948. The numbers increase to 17 percent in 1937 and 28 percent in 1948 when using the Confederate definition of the South. In other words, southern whites – depending on how the region is defined – were between 6 and 11 percent more likely to express opposition to federal intervention in state lynching cases by 1948 than they were in 1937. Writing in 1944, Charles Johnson at Fisk University summed up the conventional elite wisdom of the time: “There is fairly widespread agreement that race relations in the South have deteriorated in character since the beginning of the war.”⁵⁹ The analysis presented here suggests it is possible that the war heightened southern resistance of change to the racial status quo. The anti-fascist logic of war could be part of the causal story, as it lead some white liberals to focus

⁵⁹Charles S. Johnson, “The Present Status of Race Relations in the South,” *Social Forces*, Vol. 23., No. 1, October 1944, 27. Johnson, interestingly, saw things slightly differently. “The thesis of this paper is that the emotional disturbances of the present period, involving racial issues, are symptoms of accelerated social changes, and that these changes are wholesome, even if their temporary racial effects are bad.”

their attention more clearly on the southern racial regime, something southern whites protective of the status quo did not welcome.

But before making too much of this analysis, one clear limitation in drawing inference about change over time here is that the questions are worded differently. While they both ask about the federal government getting involved in state lynching cases, the details differ. In 1937, Gallup asked whether respondents support very specific federal actions: punitive measures directed at local police officers and fine levied against the county. In 1948, by contrast, the question did not specify which actions the federal government would take. How much of the variation over time is due to question wording effects rather than attitude change is thus unclear.

I next consider the 1948 survey more closely, with particular attention to the effects of military service. I limit the models to male respondents and estimate separate logistic regressions for the northern and southern parts of the sample. Tables 8 and 9 present the results of statistical models of the lynching variable on veteran status only (model 1) and veteran status plus age groups (model 2). The second model thus attempts to separate how much the veteran variable is capturing youth rather than the effects of military service.

The definition of the South shapes interpretation significantly in these results. Consider first the bivariate models with only veteran status as an explanatory variable. Using the Census definition, veteran status is positively associated with more support for the federal intervention position in both the North and the South, and it is actually larger in the South. By contrast, when the Confederate definition is used, veteran status in the North still has this association, but the effect in the South is no longer statistically significant. And when a multivariate model is estimated with controls in place for age groups, *only* veteran status in the North in the Confederate definition model is significant.

To summarize this and to present more interpretable results, Table 10 shows the marginal effects of military service when it is statistically significant. Using the Census definition, veterans in the North are 13 percent more likely to support federal intervention than non-veterans there, while veterans in the South are 21 percent more likely to support federal intervention than non-veterans in the region. But when age is controlled for, both effects lose their statistical significance. Using

the Confederate definition, veterans in the North are 15 percent more likely to support federal intervention than non-veterans there, while veterans in the South are not statistically different than non-veteran southerners. When age is controlled for, veterans in the North are still 10 percent more likely to support the federal intervention position than non-veterans in the North. In many cases, then, the effects of military service are often not statistically significant once the correlation of veteran status and age is controlled for. Only in the North – and even then, only when the Confederate definition of the South is used – does veteran status have a statistically significant effect among whites on the lynching question.

Military service and the beginnings of the civil rights movement: 1961

I next jump forward to 1961 to consider the effect of being a veteran on white attitudes toward segregation in the years immediately before its apex. I present the results of four OLS regressions in Table 11. In models 1-3, the effect of veteran status is significantly associated with more support for integration and robust in the presence of various controls. It is not meaningfully affected by controlling for age, partisanship, gender, and union membership. On a three-point scale, the coefficient on veteran varies between -.15 and -.19 in these initial models. Substantively, its effect is equivalent to the effect of being a Democrat (but in the opposite direction). However, model 4 presents a quite different story. When educational groups are included, the veteran coefficient is reduced by half and is no longer statistically significant. Strong educational effects do present themselves, however, especially having gone to college (-.46 and highly significant).

Why would controlling for education (but not age) cause the effect of being a veteran to wash out? The cross-tabs are suggestive. In the white sample used here, 26 percent of respondents had some college experience; 25 percent had served in the military. But among the 25 percent with military service, a much larger 39 percent had some college experience, compared to only 21 percent of non-veterans. Indeed, a bivariate logistic regression of having attended college on veteran status is highly statistically significant. This may be partially due to the effects of the 1944's Servicemen's Readjustment Act – the G.I. Bill – which substantially aided white veterans in attending college.⁶⁰

⁶⁰Empirical analysis demonstrates differential effects of the G.I. Bill on educational attainment between northern and southern black veterans, with little effect on collegiate outcomes for black veterans in the South. Sarah Turner

Future work will try to more carefully tease out whether education or military service *per se* is better seen as the relevant experience – or, alternately, whether for many veterans the educational benefits of the G.I. Bill are inseparable from the other experiences associated with their service.

Discussion

Putting all these findings together, a few general patterns emerge. In the latter years and aftermath of World War II, whites in the domestic American public did not generally see an ideological conflict between an international war directed largely at a racist regime and the widespread existence of white supremacy at home. This is especially true for southerners. In comparing opinion on federal intervention into state lynching cases before and after the war, there is some evidence that the war might have even *heightened* southern resistance to civil rights.

For whites that served in the armed forces during the war, there is mixed evidence for its effects on racial attitudes. In a 1946 survey, veterans were not more or less likely to think African Americans are being treated fairly. However, in 1948, there are robust statistical associations of veteran status and support for federal intervention in state lynching cases in the non-Confederate states. White veterans in non-Confederate states were 10 percent more supportive of the federal intervention position than whites in these states that did not serve, even when controlling for age. Within the former Confederate states, there is no evidence in any of the models of a relationship between military service and attitudes on federal intervention in lynching cases. However, there is some evidence when using the broader Census definition of the region. Here, the same association is present as in the North, but the statistical significance disappears once age is controlled for. An analysis of attitudes toward segregation among southern whites in 1961 is similarly mixed for the effects of military service. The veteran variable is significant when accompanied by a range of

and John Bound, “Closing the Gap or Widening the Divide: The Effects of the G.I. Bill and World War II on the Educational Outcomes of Black Americans,” *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 63, No. 1, March 2003, 145-177. This was not entirely unexpected in the immediate aftermath of the G.I. Bill’s passage. Writing for the American Council on Race Relations at the end of the war, William Caudill predicted that “the white GI will be considered first a veteran, second and incidentally a white man; the Negro GI will often be considered first a Negro, second and incidentally a veteran.” Quoted in David H. Onkst, “‘First a Negro...Incidentally a Veteran’: Black World War Two Veterans and the G. I. Bill of Rights in the Deep South, 1944-1948,” *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 31, No. 3, Spring 1998, 533.

controls – including age – but disappears when controlling for educational attainment.

Overall, it seems it was indeed quite possible for many white soldiers to do precisely what some liberals could not: reconcile fighting a war for both democracy *and* a caste system. And it was similarly possible for many whites supporting the war at home to do the same. Yet this is not a completely monolithic result. There are hints that military service might have had more liberalizing effects on white northern veterans than southern ones, but more analysis is needed to confirm or deny this possibility. An exploration of other survey questions related to race and civil rights could enlighten in this regard.

The statistical relationships documented in this paper can also be enlightened by considering the important shifts in the party system that coincided with the war. One underlooked figure in discussions of race and World War II and the party realignment on civil rights more broadly is 1940 Republican presidential nominee Wendell Willkie. In his post-candidacy book *One World*, Willkie declared that America could not fight “the forces of imperialism abroad and maintain any form of imperialism at home,” sounding not unlike the editorial pages of *The Nation*.⁶¹ As a presidential candidate, Willkie’s civil rights liberalism led to the 1940 Democratic platform mentioning African Americans directly for the first time in history.⁶² Under the heading “Negroes,” it read:

Our Negro citizens have participated actively in the economic and social advances launched by this Administration, including fair labor standards, social security benefits, health protection, work relief projects, decent housing, aid to education, and the rehabilitation of low-income farm families. We have aided more than half a million Negro youths in vocational training, education and employment. We shall continue to strive for complete legislative safeguards against discrimination in government service and benefits, and in the national defense forces. We pledge to uphold due process and the equal protection of the laws for every citizen, regardless of race, creed or color.⁶³

The war also coincided with the demise of the whites-only Democratic primary in the South. In 1944, *Smith v Allwright* struck down the white primary, one of the major foundations maintaining white supremacy in political power in the region.⁶⁴ The case was decided on April 3, just a month

⁶¹Quoted in Wynn, *The Afro-American and the Second World War*, 107.

⁶²Richard M. Dalfume, “Military Segregation and the 1940 Presidential Election,” *Phylon*, Vol. 30, No. 1, 1969, 48-49.

⁶³“Democratic Party Platforms: Democratic Party Platform of 1940,” The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29597>.

⁶⁴Key, *Southern Politics*, 619-643.

before NORC conducted their “Attitudes Toward Negroes” survey that May (see Table 2). As Robert Mickey demonstrates, the *Smith* ruling began a lengthy process toward more genuinely democratic politics in the South.⁶⁵ In the short term, it also provides important context about expressed attitudes toward race relations in public opinion surveys at the time.

However, it is also important not to overstate the impact of World War II. As Neil Wynn points out, “War often creates an appearance and expectation of change which only masks underlying continuities.”⁶⁶ Similarly, Adam Berinsky’s recent work offers a compelling challenge to the standard understanding of war and public opinion in Americanist political science research.⁶⁷ Berinsky argues that public opinion about war, rather than being shaped by factors unique to the war, “is shaped by the same attitudes and orientations that shape domestic politics. Public opinion during times of war is properly viewed as a continuation of the same processes that shape public opinion during times of peace.”⁶⁸ Pertinently to the subject of this paper, Berinsky uses his analysis to correct numerous myths about World War II, including the notion that it was uniquely “the good war” and that public opinion responded to it in historically specific ways. Such sentiments, he argues, are not supported by empirical evidence.⁶⁹ It is important to try and distinguish – at least as carefully as possible – the distinction between what the exogenous shock of war *changed* about the emergence of civil rights onto the political stage and what it merely *coincided* with.

Conclusion

I conclude with a methodological note. An unresolved issue, in this paper but also in other work, is that standard tests of statistical significance assume a data generating process that is probabilistic, which quota sampling is not. Thus, “the question of generating standard errors for estimates – at

⁶⁵Mickey, “The Beginning of the End for Authoritarian Rule in America,” 143-182. Borrowing from comparative politics work on Latin America, Mickey interprets the southern states pre-1944 as authoritarian enclaves within a broader democratic structure. In his presentation, unique configurations of intra-Democratic Party conflict, political institutions, and black insurgency filtered the effects of *Smith* to different “paths out of Dixie” in each state.

⁶⁶Wynn, *The Afro-American and the Second World War*, 129.

⁶⁷For example, John Mueller’s “casualties hypothesis” and work heavily influenced by it. John E. Mueller, *War, Presidents and Public Opinion*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1973.

⁶⁸Adam J. Berinsky, *In Time of War: Understanding American Public Opinion from World War II to Iraq*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009, 2.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 36-57.

both the individual and aggregate levels – should be the subject of future work,” Bersinky writes.⁷⁰ Unfortunately, this work has not yet been done. In this paper I report statistical significance in the tables and only offer substantive interpretations of coefficients that are “significant.” While this is the practice that has been followed by most work using the quota sample surveys,⁷¹ it is unclear how much the violation of the above assumption might bias standard errors (and, thus, assessments of “significance”).

One partial resolution to this uncertainty is to shift the way one understands public opinion data when using materials from the 1930s and 1940s. In comparison to political scientists using datasets like the recent ANES or Annenberg surveys, those using these early polls might very well have more in common with an historian entering an archive, albeit one with quantitative and generalizing intentions: What scholars find is likely to be haphazardly put together, but even if the final results aren’t as clear as more recently developed data, when carefully evaluated, findings can enlighten on questions political scientists have typically ignored. While some mathematical rigor is sacrificed in exchange for this, I argue the benefits of such analysis far outweigh the negative aspects as long as researchers are careful in making broad claims about their results. Despite their methodological limitations, public opinion surveys from the 1930s and 1940s provide a unique perspective on the American public during the New Deal and World War II, and careful analysis of these datasets can enlighten many questions of theoretical interest and substantive historical importance.

Future Goals

- *Making use of other available survey questions*

The 1944 “Attitudes Toward Negroes” survey contains many relevant questions, only one of which was presented here. Although it does not contain veteran status as a variable, it does potentially provide an excellent summary of white attitudes toward race near the end of World War II. The 1961 “Negro Political Participation Survey” also contains other questions

⁷⁰Berinsky, “American Public Opinion in the 1930s and 1940s,” 518.

⁷¹See footnote 49.

of interest and allows for a careful exploration of the effects of military service, at least within the South.

- *Making use of other surveys not utilized at all so far*

E.g., NORC's small sample (N=485) "Soldier's Vote" survey about the Soldier Vote Act legislation and the 1950s NES data. There are also survey questions of interest that were asked but do not seem to be available on the iPoll website.

- *Weighting the early survey data*

As noted, many of the surveys used here come from the quota sample era of public opinion polling. I hope to eventually compare results using Berinsky's weighting method to the raw results presented here. Likewise, there might be other methodological techniques not yet considered to deal with the problems in these datasets. I hope to address these issues more in future work.

- *Better connection of theory and historical context to data analysis*

Appendix

Tables

Table 1: November 1943

| | Same Chance (1) | Same Chance (2) | Same Chance (3) |
|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| South | 0.17*** (0.02) | 0.18*** (0.02) | 0.17*** (0.03) |
| Black | -0.41*** (0.02) | -0.40*** (0.02) | -0.43*** (0.02) |
| Voted FDR in 1940 | | 0.01 (0.02) | -0.01 (0.02) |
| Age | | | -0.00 (0.00) |
| Male | | | -0.04* (0.02) |
| College | | | -0.23*** (0.03) |
| High School Graduate | | | -0.12*** (0.03) |
| No High School | | | 0.13*** (0.03) |
| Pseudo R^2 | .05 | .05 | .11 |
| AIC | 3247 | 3061 | 2894 |
| Observations | 2488 | 2344 | 2340 |

Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Question wording: "Do you think negroes have the same chance as white people to make a good living in this country?"

Table 2: May 1944

| | |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| South | -0.42*** (0.04) |
| Voted FDR in 1940 | 0.01 (0.04) |
| Male | -0.03 (0.04) |
| Age | 0.00* (0.00) |
| College | -0.06 (0.05) |
| High School Graduate | 0.02 (0.05) |
| No High School | 0.00 (0.05) |
| Constant | 1.85*** (0.05) |
| Adjusted R^2 | .05 |
| Observations | 2140 |

Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Question wording: "After the war, do you expect Negroes and white people to get along with each other better, or not as well as they did before the war?" White respondents only.

Table 3: May 1946

| | Treated Fairly (1) | Treated Fairly (2) | Treated Fairly (3) |
|----------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| South | 0.17*** (0.02) | 0.17*** (0.02) | 0.17*** (0.02) |
| Black | -0.51*** (0.03) | -0.51*** (0.03) | -0.56*** (0.03) |
| WWII Vet | -0.03 (0.03) | -0.02 (0.04) | -0.05 (0.04) |
| South*WWII Vet | | -0.02 (0.08) | |
| Male | | | 0.04 (0.02) |
| Age | | | -0.00*** (0.00) |
| College | | | -0.19*** (0.03) |
| No High School | | | 0.08*** (0.02) |
| Pseudo R^2 | .07 | .07 | .10 |
| <i>AIC</i> | 2589 | 2591 | 2506 |
| Observations | 2224 | 2224 | 2218 |

Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Question wording: "Do YOU think most Negroes in the United States are being treated fairly or unfairly?"

Table 4: March-April 1948

| | Handle Minorities (1) | Handle Minorities (2) |
|--------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| South | 0.19*** (0.02) | 0.20*** (0.03) |
| Veteran | -0.03 (0.03) | -0.00 (0.03) |
| Male | | -0.01 (0.02) |
| 21-34 | | -0.02 (0.03) |
| 50+ | | 0.03 (0.03) |
| Republican | | 0.07* (0.03) |
| Democrat | | 0.03 (0.03) |
| Pseudo R^2 | .02 | .03 |
| AIC | 2909 | 2904 |
| Observations | 2285 | 2281 |

Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Question wording: "Do you think the Republicans would handle the question of [racial and religious minorities in this country], in a different way than the Democrats would, or do you think they would handle it pretty much the same way, or do you think it isn't clear yet?" White respondents only.

Table 5: Federal Government Getting Involved in Lynching Cases: Census Definition

| | 1937 (1) | 1937 (2) | 1937 (3) | 1948 (1) | 1948 (2) | 1948 (3) |
|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| South | 0.60*** (0.10) | 0.64*** (0.11) | 0.52*** (0.11) | 0.85*** (0.11) | 0.86*** (0.11) | 0.86*** (0.11) |
| Male | | 0.14 (0.09) | 0.12 (0.09) | | 0.16* (0.08) | 0.13 (0.08) |
| Voted FDR in 1936 | | -0.22* (0.09) | -0.21* (0.09) | | | |
| Voted FDR in 1944 | | | | | -0.54*** (0.09) | -0.55*** (0.09) |
| 17-24 | | -0.64*** (0.15) | -0.62*** (0.15) | | | |
| 18-24 | | | | | -0.67*** (0.17) | -0.70*** (0.17) |
| 25-34 | | -0.50*** (0.13) | -0.49*** (0.13) | | -0.54*** (0.13) | -0.49*** (0.13) |
| 35-44 | | -0.21 (0.13) | -0.22 (0.13) | | -0.16 (0.13) | -0.15 (0.13) |
| 55+ | | -0.00 (0.14) | -0.05 (0.15) | | 0.20 (0.13) | 0.15 (0.13) |
| Urban | | | -0.46*** (0.09) | | | |
| No High School | | | | | | 0.06 (0.12) |
| High School Grad | | | | | | 0.02 (0.13) |
| College | | | | | | -0.18 (0.13) |
| Constant | -0.21*** (0.05) | 0.10 (0.12) | 0.45** (0.14) | -0.27*** (0.04) | 0.04 (0.11) | 0.08 (0.14) |
| Pseudo R^2 | .01 | .02 | .03 | .02 | .04 | .04 |
| AIC | 3206 | 3135 | 3113 | 3538 | 3406 | 3255 |
| Observations | 2337 | 2307 | 2307 | 2605 | 2563 | 2445 |

Standard errors in parentheses. Logit estimates. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 6: Federal Government Getting Involved in Lynching Cases: Confederate Definition

| | 1937 (1) | 1937 (2) | 1937 (3) | 1948 (1) | 1948 (2) | 1948 (3) |
|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| South | 0.70*** (0.13) | 0.77*** (0.13) | 0.66*** (0.13) | 1.19*** (0.14) | 1.21*** (0.15) | 1.16*** (0.15) |
| Male | | 0.14 (0.09) | 0.12 (0.09) | | 0.16* (0.08) | 0.14 (0.08) |
| Voted FDR in 1936 | | -0.21* (0.09) | -0.21* (0.09) | | | |
| Voted FDR in 1944 | | | | | -0.54*** (0.09) | -0.55*** (0.09) |
| 17-24 | | -0.65*** (0.15) | -0.63*** (0.15) | | | |
| 18-24 | | | | | -0.68*** (0.17) | -0.71*** (0.17) |
| 25-34 | | -0.51*** (0.13) | -0.49*** (0.13) | | -0.56*** (0.13) | -0.51*** (0.13) |
| 35-44 | | -0.21 (0.13) | -0.23 (0.13) | | -0.18 (0.13) | -0.17 (0.13) |
| 55+ | | -0.03 (0.14) | -0.07 (0.15) | | 0.18 (0.13) | 0.13 (0.13) |
| Urban | | | -0.50*** (0.09) | | | |
| No High School | | | | | | 0.08 (0.12) |
| High School Grad | | | | | | 0.03 (0.13) |
| College | | | | | | -0.19 (0.13) |
| Constant | -0.17*** (0.04) | 0.14 (0.12) | 0.51*** (0.14) | -0.24*** (0.04) | 0.08 (0.11) | 0.12 (0.14) |
| Pseudo R^2 | .01 | .02 | .03 | .02 | .05 | .05 |
| AIC | 3209 | 3138 | 3110 | 3527 | 3394 | 3249 |
| Observations | 2337 | 2307 | 2307 | 2605 | 2563 | 2445 |

Standard errors in parentheses. Logit estimates. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 7: Marginal Effects of Region in Bivariate Lynching Bill Models

| | 1937 | 1937 | 1948 | 1948 |
|----------------------------|------|------|------|------|
| South (Confederate States) | +17% | | +28% | |
| South (Census Divisions) | | +15% | | +21% |

Table 8: Effect of Military Service on White Men (South: Census Divisions)

| | North | North | South | South |
|--------------|--------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Veteran | -0.54*** (0.14) | -0.32 (0.17) | -0.95** (0.30) | -0.46 (0.41) |
| 18-24 | | -0.24 (0.29) | | -0.54 (0.63) |
| 25-34 | | -0.32 (0.22) | | -0.78 (0.54) |
| 35-44 | | -0.02 (0.21) | | -0.58 (0.43) |
| 55+ | | 0.11 (0.19) | | 0.11 (0.43) |
| Constant | -0.01 (0.07) | 0.00 (0.15) | 1.11*** (0.17) | 1.28*** (0.31) |
| Pseudo R^2 | .01 | .01 | .03 | .05 |
| AIC | 1449 | 1450 | 304 | 307 |
| Observations | 1059 | 1057 | 253 | 253 |

Standard errors in parentheses. Logit estimates.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 9: Effect of Military Service on White Men (South: Confederate States)

| | North | North | South | South |
|--------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Veteran | -0.62*** (0.13) | -0.39* (0.17) | -0.66 (0.42) | 0.05 (0.59) |
| 18-24 | | -0.17 (0.27) | | -2.52* (1.01) |
| 25-34 | | -0.36 (0.21) | | -1.83 (0.98) |
| 35-44 | | -0.03 (0.19) | | -2.03* (0.82) |
| 55+ | | 0.12 (0.18) | | -1.01 (0.84) |
| Constant | 0.06 (0.07) | 0.07 (0.14) | 1.40*** (0.24) | 2.67*** (0.73) |
| Pseudo R^2 | .01 | .02 | .02 | .08 |
| AIC | 1592 | 1591 | 161 | 158 |
| Observations | 1164 | 1162 | 148 | 148 |

Standard errors in parentheses. Logit estimates.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 10: Marginal Effects of Military Service on White Men in 1948 Lynching Models

| | <i>Census Definition</i> | | <i>Confederate Definition</i> | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|-------|-------------------------------|-------|
| | North | South | North | South |
| <i>no controls</i> | | | | |
| Veteran | -13 % | -21 % | -15% | — |
| <i>controlling for age</i> | | | | |
| Veteran | — | — | -10% | — |

Table 11: Southern White Attitudes Toward Segregation, 1961

| | Segregation (1) | Segregation (2) | Segregation (3) | Segregation (4) |
|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Veteran | -0.16** (0.05) | -0.15** (0.06) | -0.19** (0.07) | -0.08 (0.07) |
| Age | | 0.00 (0.00) | 0.00 (0.00) | 0.00 (0.00) |
| Democrat | | | 0.19*** (0.05) | 0.17*** (0.05) |
| Female | | | -0.06 (0.06) | 0.00 (0.06) |
| Union | | | 0.09 (0.11) | 0.07 (0.10) |
| No High School | | | | 0.10 (0.08) |
| High School Graduate | | | | -0.16* (0.07) |
| College | | | | -0.46*** (0.08) |
| Constant | 2.63*** (0.03) | 2.53*** (0.08) | 2.42*** (0.11) | 2.66*** (0.12) |
| Adjusted R^2 | .01 | .01 | .03 | .13 |
| AIC | 1253 | 1253 | 1182 | 1111 |
| Observations | 679 | 679 | 639 | 638 |

Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$