

THE COLD WAR: THE PURSUIT OF FREEDOM FROM AN UNFREED NATION, THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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The end of World War II brought some temporary joy to the United States and many other nations across the globe. Nevertheless, such a joy barely lasted as tension among its wartime ally, the Soviet Union, escalated to what is now known as the Cold War. The Cold War (1946-1991) was a forty-five year diplomatic conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union; it represented an ideological war that created numerous conflicts, particularly in the developing world.¹ It is important to mention that the United States envisioned Soviet expansion as a threat to freedom and thus democracy due to the authoritarian and inhumane tendencies of Stalin's regime.² While the United States aimed to spread democracy and freedom around the world during the Cold War, this paper will argue that the American government had in place several oppressive laws—Jim Crow—and treatments that restricted African Americans from enjoying civil liberties and the democratic system that the United States was trying to implement overseas.

In 1947, president Harry Truman addressed Congress to ask for \$400 million in military and economic assistance for Turkey and Greece, countries that were, according to United States officials, under threat of communist expansion. During his speech, Truman explained that "the very existence of the Greek state [was] threatened by the terrorist activities of several thousand armed men, led by Communists."³ In addition, Truman also mentioned the role of the United States in international affairs. He said that the primary objectives of the foreign policy of the United States [was] the creation of conditions in which [the United States] and other nations [would] be able to work out a way of life free from coercion."⁴ Thus, Truman's administration viewed themselves as one of the leading actors in establishing world stability and freedom.

¹ The Brief American Pageant, 609

² The Brief American Pageant, 608

³ The Truman Doctrine

⁴ The Truman Doctrine

One of the most remarkable aspects of Truman's speech was his binary perception of the world's affairs; Truman thought that there were two ways of life. One of them was based "upon the will of the majority [which was] distinguished by free institutions, representative government, free elections, guarantees of individual liberty, freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression."⁵ The other way of life was based "upon the will of a minority forcibly imposed upon the majority [that relied on] terror and oppression, a controlled press and radio; fixed elections, and the suppression of personal freedoms."⁶ In other words, Truman implied that those two ways of life reassembled United States ideals—democracy—and Soviet ideals—oppressive systems. Even though the United States had a relatively democratic system, there were millions of Americans that did not enjoy the individual liberty and freedom that Truman claimed to have.

African Americans were subjected to several restrictions of individual liberty at the time due to Jim Crow laws—racial discriminatory measures that were implemented since the end of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, there was an emerging African American middle class that allowed them to experience more mobility, particularly during and after World War II. However, African American travelers faced hardship because business owners in hotels and restaurants refused to host them due to racial prejudices. For instance, the *Negro Motorist Green Book* issued in 1948, one year after Truman's speech, exemplified the discriminatory treatments that African Americans were facing at the time. The Green Book contained numerous instructions to African Americans about the hotels and areas they could visit to avoid embarrassment and the potential of being harassed and hurt.⁷ The beginning of the Green Book included an introduction

⁵ The Truman Doctrine

⁶ The Truman Doctrine

⁷ The Negro Motorist Green Book: 1948

with hope that one day such a book did not need to be published; a "day when [African Americans will] have equal opportunities and privileges in the United States."⁸ It is important to mention that the Green Book worked as a cautionary guidance to protect African Americans from embarrassing and sometimes even dangerous encounters due to the absence of constitutional protection from the United States government.

While African Americans were dealing with restricted liberties, American foreign policy contradicted some of the hardship that black Americans were facing in their own land. Eisenhower gave a speech in June 1952, in which he referred to communism as a belief that aimed to destroy all freedom, and specially, the freedom of Americans.⁹ Eisenhower explained that Soviets wanted to implement slavery around the world and specially among Americans because Americans believed strongly in freedom. Such a statement illustrates the obliviousness of the United States government to domestic struggles, and specially to their own history—the slave trade. The American officials envisioned themselves as a nation that granted freedom to all individuals, and by doing so, it undermined the flaws of American democracy, its judicial system, and its problematic past and relationship with African Americans. Thus, the freedom that Eisenhower and his government was referring was a freedom that benefited only some Americans and not all as he claimed in his speech. That limitation of freedom was kept throughout some years of the Cold War, which can be exemplified by the issuing of new Green Books that aimed to keep protecting African Americans.

For instance, in 1952, a new Green Book named the *Negro Travelers* was published. Similarly, to the *Negro Motorist Green Book* of 1948, the *Negro Travelers Green Book* illustrates the continuing struggle of African Americans while travelling across the United States.

⁸ The Negro Motorist Green Book: 1948

⁹ Eisenhower Speech 1952

The book includes list of hotels, restaurants, and even churches that would accept the entrance and stay of black Americans. An interesting aspect of the *Negro Travelers* is that it included a three-page section to talk about New Orleans and its multiethnic and culturally diverse demographics. For instance, the Green Book said that New Orleans was a city that allowed the celebration of carnival, which was a Catholic celebration; it also talked about creole food and how the city had a significant number of Catholic African Americans. Furthermore, the book also talked about how the city had several black churches and the only Catholic university for African Americans in the entire country. New Orleans was a city that illustrated the complexities of racial dynamics in the United States, and that is because it had a relatively better treatment and opportunities for African Americans. Therefore, it is important to recognize that racial oppression and civil liberties were subject to changes depending on the city and region in the United States. However, that does not mean that there was a significant lack of constitutional measurements to protect the wellbeing and lives of African Americans.

Besides hotels, railways, and restaurants, African Americans also were discriminated against at airports. For instance, by the mid-1950s racial segregation in airport terminal facilities was the rule in the entire Southern region of the United States.¹⁰ Gloster Current, the director of branches for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, traveled to cities all across the country to visit the organization's local chapters.¹¹ Current was part of the growing number of African American business travelers and when he was at the "Oklahoma City airport he encountered whites-only service at the Sky Chefs restaurant in the fall of 1952. He was also denied service at the dining room run at the airport in Birmingham, Alabama, two years later."¹²

¹⁰ The Emergence of the Jim Crow Airport, 1

¹¹ The Emergence of the Jim Crow Airport, 19

¹² The Emergence of the Jim Crow Airport, 19

African American mobility was limited in several ways. There were institutional laws that jeopardized the civil liberties of this underrepresented community. This explains that such freedom that president Eisenhower claimed to have in the United States did not apply to African Americans that had to experience embarrassment and systematic laws that symbolized a second-citizen treatment.

Even though the United States had several laws that discriminated against African Americans, in May 1954 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that U.S. state laws establishing racial segregation in public schools were unconstitutional. This decision became a predominant topic among international debates, especially because the Cold War intensified talks about freedom, equality, and democracy. For example, Dudziak, in her article, “Brown as a Cold War Case”, explains that America’s practice of racial discrimination was used as a powerful tool by the Soviets in discrediting the America’s democratic ideals. Furthermore, Dudziak talked about the visit of ambassador Warren to Moscow in 1959, where the first question he was asked was about racial segregation.¹³ According to this article, the motives behind the Supreme Court’s decisions were not based essentially on the basis of equal rights—especially knowing desegregation in schools took a long time to be implemented after the ruling—but rather as an strategy to alleviate the international perceptions of countries around the world towards the United States. That shows the contradiction of American freedom, freedom that was only fully granted to certain ethnic and racial groups.

Regardless of the motives behind the court’s ruling, the Brown vs. Board of Education symbolized an important step towards racial equality. Nevertheless, it also exemplified the beginning of a longer and difficult path to gain civil rights and freedom for African Americans.

¹³ Brown as a Cold War Case

The *Travelers' Green Book: 1963-64 International Edition* which had similar goals as previous Green Books, to ensure a comfortable and safe experience to African Americans when traveling. Even though it said international edition, the book included several domestic destinations which represents the need of having such a guidance to travel safely. The book was published almost ten years after the Brown vs. Board of Education case. It shows the flaws of the democratic system of the United States of America. In a democracy, there is no need for segregated spaces, neither the prevention of civil liberties due to a race. Thus, it demonstrates how the Cold War was a critical period for the United States in understanding what freedom was and what being American meant. Such a conversation was often dismissed by politicians and important figures. For example, president Johnson's first presidential speech in 1963 addressed the nation to talk about several topics, including the Cold War and the fight for freedom, but he did not say a word about African American struggles at the time.¹⁴

During the Cold War, the U.S. played a role of democratic fighter for the pursuit of freedom against communism and Soviet rule. Nevertheless, that freedom was not fully enjoyed among-its citizens due to the numerous discriminatory laws that African Americans encountered. Some of them were included in Green Books for several years in order to show what places would not reject them because of their race. African Americans did not only see limitations in railroads, restaurants, and hotels, but also segregated areas within airports that were sometimes exclusively white. The Cold War had also some small victories for this segregated racial group. For instance, the Brown vs. Board of Education case that desegregated schools, nonetheless, the motives of the ruling class questioned the type of freedom that the U.S. was trying to advocate internationally. The United States had certain democratic practices, but freedom was only

¹⁴ President Johnson's First Speech (1963)

granted to certain groups of the population. Consequently, the United States was praised for democracy overseas while freedom was not granted to African Americans.

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