

**THE ROLE OF THE FAIR EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES
COMMISSION IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT**

WHY SHOULD WE MARCH?



15,000 Negroes Assembled at St. Louis, Missouri
20,000 Negroes Assembled at Chicago, Illinois
23,500 Negroes Assembled at New York City
Millions of Negro Americans all Over This Great
Land Claim the Right to be Free!

FREE FROM WANT!
FREE FROM FEAR!
FREE FROM JIM CROW!

*Winning Democracy for the Negro is Winning the War
for Democracy A. Philip Randolph*

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8th Grade

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June 25, 1941, civil rights activists, A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin, led approximately fifty-thousand African American protestors to the nation's capitol to protest the considerable amounts of discrimination in the workplace. But how has this event not been documented? The answer to this is a simple, "because it never happened." During the early 1940s, Civil Rights leaders had been pressuring the federal government to improve the amount of opportunities for African Americans in the military, government, and defense industries. Very little progress was made towards this improvement until even more pressure was put on the government. Randolph and Rustin had set in place plans to start a "March on Washington." Instead of holding the rally, Randolph called it off due to the signing of the Executive Order 8802 and the creation of The Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Though many historians question the FEPC's impact on the later 1960s Civil Rights Movement, after much research, the conclusion has been drawn to state that though the FEPC and Executive Order 8802, "declared that it is the duty of employers and of labor organizations ... to provide for the full and equitable participation of all workers in defense industries, without discrimination because of race, creed, color, or national origin," (Executive Order 8802) the FEPC did not play a part in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s for several reasons.

There were unsettled issues regarding the FEPC and Executive Order 8802. The Executive Order 8802 lacked enforcement power and mainly made "recommendations" to federal agencies; private sectors were not held to or forced to abide by its rules and regulations. In the 1940s, United States legislation still consisted of an all-Caucasian Senate and House of Representatives that were considerably prejudice in their voting when trying to make the FEPC and Executive Order 8802 stronger and more successful. In 1943, a newer and more noteworthy

Executive Order was implemented by FDR. Though the Executive Order 9346 required all government contracts to have a non-discrimination clause, industries still found ways to circumvent it, and private sectors were still unbound and had accounts of discrimination in the work place. The few times Negro workers were able to get jobs equivalent to their Caucasian co-workers were when it came time for yearly regulation inspections on white companies and their abiding by the Executive Order 8802.

One of the few cases where "fortunate" Negro workers were able to get opportunities that led to jobs that brought them closest to "equal" with their co-workers was described in a letter to the Director of Field Operations for the FEPC, Witherspoon Dodge, by the Alabama Dry Dock & Ship Building Company:

"We have two supplementary classes operated for the Negroes in the North Yard, and they are being instructed in the hull erection. These men receive training 6 hours a week, and will be upgraded when they are capable of performing the work as ship fitters in the hull erection company" (Floyd).

Though the letter was telling Dodge of the developments being made to their company, a later report showed that about 8% of those workers were seen as "capable" to become ship fitters. This was only one of many cases where companies put up a façade of change when they were actually still rejecting the rules and regulations of Executive Order 8802 and the FEPC.

Another notation as to why the FEPC was not a contributor, nor did it play a role in, the later 1960s Civil Rights Movement was the fact that it only investigated the discrimination found in government operated airfields, ship yards, supply centers, and ammunition plants. Many African American's (Negros) had a difficult time finding jobs in the city during the war and

watched as other Caucasian men received all of the well-paying manufacturing jobs. "At home, African Americans were getting the best-paying jobs of their lives, but discrimination in hiring still plagued American industry" (African Americans). Many believe that if the FEPC "expanded its horizons" and worked with African American workers in all types of fields, they would have had a larger impact on the African American people and community. In one letter from Witherspoon Dodge responding to a woman that worked in a printing industry, she had problems that could be considered worse than some of those confronted with the FEPC's help to African American home front industry workers, but Dodge was not able to help her. The woman Dodge wrote to and rejected was only one of many that sought out help from the FEPC with the same discrimination problems as the home front industry employees. If the Fair Employment Practices Commission compromised with the government to find ways they could help a larger faction, they would have without doubt been a major contributor to the later Civil Rights Movement.

Though the FEPC did not play a role in the later 1960s Civil Rights Movement, it still did affect the people of its time in ways that began to form a new governmental view about African Americans. By showing their gumption and desire to work hard for their futures and rights, the FEPC, and African Americans that associated with it and turned to it when they felt they were being discriminated were able to break barriers and create a name for themselves. So next time you hear, "Discrimination is a hellhound that gnaws at Negroes in every waking moment of their lives to remind them that the lie of their inferiority is accepted as truth in the society dominating them," think of the FEPC (Heroism Project).

Works Cited

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