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Race, Roosevelt, and Wartime Production: Fair Employment in World War II Labor Markets

By WILLIAM J. COLLINS*

Black economic progress in the 1940's was remarkable not only in relation to subsequent decades, but even more so in relation to previous decades. Comparisons of relative economic standing before the 1940's are somewhat difficult to make because comprehensive income measures are unavailable before the 1940 Census, but relative income estimates by James P. Smith (1984) suggest that the magnitude of change in the 1940's marked a turning point in African-American economic history.¹ The 1940's seem all the more extraordinary in light of Gunnar Myrdal's (1944) famous appraisal and condemnation of America's racial discrimination at the decade's beginning.² Although labor economists have devoted considerable attention to black economic progress in the post-1964 period, it is surprising that the 1940's, and the wartime experience in particular, have been neglected. This paper provides new evidence on how such remarkable progress was achieved in the face of the obstacles Myrdal chronicled. In

particular, it investigates the effectiveness of the federal government's first far-reaching effort to enforce an antidiscrimination policy amongst defense contractors through the Fair Employment Practice Committee (FEPC).

Previous studies of the 1940's by Thomas N. Maloney (1994) and Robert A. Margo (1995) have found that the compression of wages across and within skill groups was an important (if impermanent) contributor to black relative wage gains because black workers were located at the lower ends of the wage and skill distributions. They also highlight the importance of the occupational, industrial, and geographic redistribution of black workers. For example, between 1940 and 1950 the proportion of black male workers classified as operatives (semi-skilled workers) in the Census rose from 12.6 to 21.4 percent (whites went from 19.0 to 20.2 percent), and the proportion in manufacturing industries rose from 16.2 to 23.9 percent (whites went from 25.5 to 27.7). Collins (2000) explores these transitions in detail using a collection of work histories and finds that black men who worked in war-related industries during the 1940's and who were still working in such industries in 1950 earned a substantial premium (around 14 percent) over observationally similar black men who did not enter these industries. The movement of black men into manufacturing industries in the 1940's was central to their economic progress. This paper's evidence suggests that the Roosevelt administration's effort to enforce a nondiscrimination policy in war-related employment played an economically significant role in opening doors for black workers.

Economists' relative neglect of the 1940's labor market might be rooted in the view that the extraordinary wartime circumstances which drove black advancement are historically unique and therefore irrelevant to current policy. The effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of the wartime antidiscrimination policy, however,

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¹ Smith constructs relative income estimates by assigning each occupation a race-specific income based on the 1970 Census. Changes over time in the overall relative income estimates are then driven by changes in occupational distributions.

² During World War II, Myrdal detailed the numerous impediments to black advancement, but he also recognized that "The present War is of tremendous importance to the Negro in all respects. He finds his strategic position strengthened not only because of the desperate scarcity of labor but also because of a revitalization of the American Creed" (p. 409).

has implications not only for the interpretation of history, but also for the understanding of contemporary civil rights and affirmative action policies whose lineage is easily traced to the wartime experience. Debates of the merits (or demerits) of contemporary policy should be well informed about how policy has evolved and why it has succeeded or failed under a variety of circumstances, including those characterizing the 1940's.

I. What Was the Fair Employment Practice Committee?

The FEPC was established to receive, investigate, and resolve complaints of discrimination by Executive Order 8802 on June 25, 1941. The order declared that "there shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color, or national origin" (FEPC, 1946 p. 98). By design, the Committee did not initiate investigations of particular employers or unions in the absence of a specific complaint. This framework helped the Committee sidestep allegations that it unfairly targeted particular industries or regions (Louis Ruchames, 1953 p. 140), and given the political precariousness of its position, establishing a reputation for evenhandedness was a high priority. Nonetheless, this extension of executive power into labor markets made the FEPC "the most controversial federal agency in the nation during the war and perhaps in modern American history" (Merl E. Reed, 1991 p. 1), and it would probably have been politically unsustainable were it not for the imperatives of the wartime economy. Indeed, the FEPC was dismantled when the war ended, and despite the efforts of fair employment advocates, nearly two decades passed before the Civil Rights Act of 1964 barred racial discrimination in employment.

The FEPC existed in two incarnations. The First Committee was organized in August 1941, and it undertook a series of highly visible public hearings, starting in Los Angeles in October 1941 and then visiting Chicago, New York, and Birmingham. These hearings were meant not only to put pressure on discriminatory employers, but also to raise the public profile of the FEPC and the antidiscrimination policy it was determined to enforce. This exposure was crucial because the announcement of the executive

order had not received much media attention, except from black newspapers (Ruchames, 1953 p. 23). After its June 1942 hearings in Birmingham, the First Committee effectively lost its independent status when it was placed under Paul McNutt's War Manpower Commission (WMC). Subsequently, key FEPC personnel resigned, and the organization disintegrated.

Roosevelt reformulated the FEPC in Executive Order 9346 of May 27, 1943. The Second Committee, once again independent, established regional offices in 16 cities and thereby substantially increased the staff's ability to investigate and resolve complaints of discrimination. Although the Second Committee still held hearings for especially resistant employers, most cases with merit were handled effectively through negotiation and persuasion. The Committee docketed 5,803 new cases between July 1, 1943 and December 31, 1944, and during that same period, 1,723 cases received "satisfactory adjustments," implying that in the face of a valid complaint, the charged party eventually agreed to discard its discriminatory employment practices.³ The Committee's *Final Report* emphasizes that many FEPC cases were quietly and satisfactorily adjusted for every one which reached the public-hearing stage (FEPC, 1946 p. 10). In the course of settling a case, the FEPC often acted as an integration consultant of sorts by offering advice about how to bring black workers into a plant or to upgrade them without disrupting work.

For example, the Committee's *First Report* discusses its role in facilitating black employment, training, and promotion at a chemical company in Philadelphia which had previously refused to employ blacks above the level of unskilled laborer. In response to the FEPC inquiry, "Management officials stated that a previous effort to use Negroes in nonlaboring jobs had resulted in a walkout and asked the Committee's representative to aid them in working out their program of upgrading and integration" (FEPC, 1945 p. 77). Eventually, the firm successfully employed and integrated black

³ Additionally, the Committee dismissed approximately 2,100 cases during this period either "on their merits" (after investigation, the employer was cleared of the accusation) or due to "insufficient evidence" (the case was so weak at the outset that an investigation was not pursued).

workers in positions other than unskilled labor. The report relates similar anecdotes for firms in New York, Cincinnati, Chicago, and California.

Even so, two atypical cases illuminate the nature of the Committee's power in the face of resistant employers and employees. In the Philadelphia transit case (August 1944), white workers went on strike following an effort to employ black trolley operators. After referring the case to the President (the FEPC's ultimate recourse to power which was rarely exercised), the Army took over the transit system. Subsequently, white workers returned to work almost immediately after it was suggested that they would lose their jobs and have their draft status reconsidered (Ruchames, 1953 p. 116). The FEPC could not always count on the timely intervention of more powerful agencies, however, as demonstrated by the "railroad case," which according to the *Final Report* "must be counted among the Committee's outstanding failures" (FEPC, 1946 p. 12). Unable to untangle a complicated knot of discriminatory agreements between a number of southern railroads and unions, the FEPC referred the case to Roosevelt, who appointed a "special committee" to deal with the impasse. The case was never resolved, however, and the southern railroads essentially ignored the FEPC's directives, asserting that the "Committee was and is wholly without constitutional and legal jurisdiction and power to make and issue the directives which it made and issued, and for this reason the said directives are without legal effect" (quoted in Ruchames, 1953 p. 68).

The effectiveness of the Roosevelt administration's effort to combat discrimination has been disputed in the histories of wartime labor markets. In 1953, Ruchames argued that "Executive Order 8802, issued by President Roosevelt on June 25, 1941, constituted the most important effort in the history of this country to eliminate discrimination in employment by use of government authority" (p. 22). The FEPC itself, citing larger-than-average black employment gains in the first plants it investigated, insisted that its enforcement of the executive order was fundamental to wartime black employment gains (FEPC, 1946 pp. 65-78, 142).⁴

⁴ The plants involved in the FEPC's first public hearings increased their nonwhite/white employment ratio from 0.016 to 0.053 between late 1941 and early 1944. This

change is only slightly larger than that in all defense-related firms reporting to the War Manpower Commission in September 1942 and January 1944. The FEPC argues that the increase in black employment in the plants involved in hearings would have been substantially less were it not for the Committee's intervention.

However, Barton Bernstein (1968), Richard Pollenberg (1972), and other historians have argued that the FEPC accomplished little in the way of promoting black employment. Most recently, Stephan and Abigail Thernstrom have claimed that Roosevelt "established a committee whose powers were mainly exhortatory, with the result that the FEPC was a dismal failure" (1997 p. 72). Except for the FEPC's own arguments, none of these historical opinions has been based on statistical evidence. A priori, there are several reasons to be skeptical of the success of the administration's efforts. First, Executive Order 8802 was the direct outcome of A. Philip Randolph's threat to lead 100,000 people in a march on Washington to protest the meager opportunities for black workers in defense-related employment, including the armed forces.⁵ Though sympathetic to the principle of nondiscrimination, Roosevelt clearly did not want to issue the order, and therefore there must be some doubt about the administration's determination to stand firmly behind it (Doris Kearns Goodwin, 1994 pp. 246-53). Second, the FEPC had limited powers to coerce resistant employers to hire blacks. The Committee could sometimes marshal the pressure of public opinion by accusing a discriminatory employer or union of holding up the war effort or could bring indirect pressure to bear through the WMC and War and Navy Departments. However, lacking the power of statutory law, the Committee could not directly penalize firms, managers, or unions that failed to comply with the Executive Order. Third, the Committee's total staff numbered only 119 employees in December 1944—hardly an abundance of manpower for the task at hand (FEPC, 1945 p. 10). Fourth, the Committee was under constant attack from its opponents in Congress, and this probably weakened its credibility. Could a committee with a small budget that was engendered

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⁵ A. Philip Randolph was the leader of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the period's most powerful black labor organization.

by a political compromise and operated without the ability to directly penalize resistant employers possibly have helped improve the economic position of blacks? Or were all of the observed wartime employment gains inevitable given the tight wartime labor markets, as Thernstrom and Thernstrom (1997) and others have asserted?

II. The Empirical Framework

A simple model of local labor markets in the 1940's can illustrate how the FEPC might have promoted black employment by altering the incentives firms faced. According to Myrdal (1944) and Robert C. Weaver (1944), when the United States entered the war there was a large shift in demand for white workers in the war-industry sector. As production accelerated and the military siphoned off potential workers, the available supply of white workers, especially men, was virtually exhausted.⁶ At this point, a manager would have to weigh the benefits of hiring black workers to expand production against his own taste for discrimination and the expected losses associated with disgruntled white workers, including potential strikes, compensating wage demands, or lower morale.⁷ Anecdotal evidence suggests that the FEPC could have made a difference in how this balance was struck by publicly embarrassing discriminatory managers and unions, offering advice on how to successfully integrate black workers, providing managers with a handy excuse to hire blacks despite the wishes of white employees or community norms, or threatening to bring more powerful government institutions such as the War Manpower Commission, War Department and Navy, or even the President into the dispute on the side of the FEPC. Each of these factors would serve either to lower the expected cost of integrating the workforce or to raise the expected cost of noncompliance with the execu-

tive orders. By altering the incentives firms faced, the FEPC might also have altered their hiring behavior. If so, econometric investigation might reveal a positive relationship between black employment gains in defense industries and FEPC interventions. These gains could be larger at the local level than at the firm level if FEPC intervention at a few firms altered local racial hiring norms and therefore had spillover effects on other firms' hiring patterns.

Although econometric studies have not assessed the importance of wartime antidiscrimination policy, several papers have explored similar postwar efforts, most often using firm-level minority employment data.⁸ A large sample of firm-level employment data by race for the 1940's does not yet exist, and so a somewhat different approach to identifying a policy effect must be taken. The WMC regularly collected firm-level "ES-270 Reports" covering more than 75 percent of employment in manufacturing and more than 90 percent of employment in munitions industries. The WMC compiled bimonthly summaries of these ES-270 Reports for internal use, and a few of these summaries can be found in the microfilmed records of the FEPC.⁹ These summaries provide

⁸ William M. Landes (1968) studied the impact of *state-level* fair employment laws in the postwar period, and he identified a substantial relative wage effect, though no effect on relative occupational distributions during the 1950's. A number of economists have attempted to measure the employment impact of the federal government's antidiscrimination efforts in the 1964 to 1980 period using firm-level data. See Orley Ashenfelter and James Heckman (1976), Morris Goldstein and Robert S. Smith (1976), Jonathan Leonard (1984), and William M. Rodgers III and William E. Spriggs (1996). Most of these studies have found that federal contractor status had a positive impact on the relative employment growth of blacks and that the effect of a compliance review was larger still. John J. Donohue and Heckman concisely summarize the results of such studies (1991 Table 7). Most recently, Kenneth Y. Chay (1998) has used longitudinal earnings data for men from 1957 to 1975 to identify a significant impact of the 1964 Civil Rights Act on the earnings of black men in the South.

⁹ See Bruce I. Friend (1970) regarding the contents of Roll 70. The major industry groups in the reports are manufacturing, transportation, government, and coal mining, and so they cover a rather broad range. Of the 14 million workers covered by the July 1944 report, 9 million were in munitions. Overall, 7.6 percent of workers in munitions were nonwhite whereas 7.7 percent of workers in all ES-270 firms were nonwhite. This suggests that the broadness of ES-270 coverage does not give a misleading picture of more

⁶ Because of numerical constraints imposed to maintain segregation in the military and the relatively high rejection rate for black draftees, white men were inducted at faster rate than blacks, especially in the early years of the war effort (Richard M. Dalfiume, 1969 pp. 51-4).

⁷ See Gary S. Becker (1957) for models in which employers or employees have a taste for discrimination. See Barbara R. Bergmann and William Darity, Jr. (1981) for a model in which interracial friction in a firm may lower profitability.

TABLE 1—SUMMARY STATISTICS AND DEFINITIONS

Variable	U.S. mean	U.S. standard deviation	Non-South mean	Non-South standard deviation	South mean	South standard deviation
$\Delta(NW/W)_{defense\ 1940-44}$	0.0130	0.0573	0.0247	0.0309	-0.0104	0.0851
$(NW/W)_{1940\ defense}$	0.0801	0.1236	0.0233	0.0249	0.1938	0.1597
$(NW/W)_{1940\ population}$	0.1624	0.2094	0.0561	0.0681	0.3752	0.2341
Defense/total employment	0.4128	0.1051	0.4407	0.0985	0.3567	0.0961
Caseload 1-9	0.4651	0.5007	0.5000	0.5029	0.3953	0.4947
Caseload 10-49	0.2248	0.4191	0.1744	0.3817	0.3256	0.4741
Caseload 50-99	0.0620	0.2421	0.0581	0.2354	0.0697	0.2578
Caseload 100-199	0.0233	0.1513	0.0349	0.1846	—	—
Caseload 200+	0.0310	0.1740	0.0465	0.2118	—	—
NAACP 500-999	0.1705	0.3776	0.1163	0.3224	0.2791	0.4539
NAACP 1000-2499	0.1163	0.3218	0.0814	0.2750	0.1860	0.3937
NAACP 2500+	0.1240	0.3309	0.1279	0.3359	0.1163	0.3244
Midpoint cases	28.06	64.26	33.60	76.96	16.98	20.42
Cases/establishments	0.4173	0.6960	0.3778	0.6876	0.4965	0.7139
South	0.3333	0.4732	—	—	—	—
West	0.1163	0.3218	0.1744	0.3817	—	—
North Central	0.2946	0.4576	0.4419	0.4995	—	—
Population 1940	0.3087	0.7527	0.3928	0.9091	0.1406	0.1038
FEPC office	0.1240	0.3309	0.1395	0.3485	0.0930	0.2939
Earnings premium	0.2715	0.1113	0.2765	0.1118	0.2616	0.1110
Establishments	67.07	91.54	81.36	107.8	38.49	27.93
$\Delta(NW/W)_{defense\ 1940-50}$	0.0245	0.0471	0.0253	0.0320	0.0229	0.0684
Observations	129	129	86	86	43	43

Notes: These figures are unweighted. The cumulative war contract variable is not reported in the table because it is not available for each city in the sample. For 85 U.S. cities the average war contract value in billions of dollars is 1.666 (standard deviation = 2.398). $\Delta(NW/W)_{defense}$ is the change in the nonwhite/white defense employment ratio from 1940 to 1944. $(NW/W)_{1940\ defense}$ is the 1940 nonwhite/white defense employment ratio. $(NW/W)_{1940}$ is the nonwhite/white population ratio. The *caseload* indicator variables reflect the number of docketed cases in each city from July 1, 1943 to June 30, 1944. The NAACP indicators are for branch membership levels in 1943. *Defense/total employment* is the proportion of workers in defense-related industries (manufacturing, transportation, government, mining). The *midpoint cases* variable assigns each city the midpoint value of the relevant range of cases. Top-coded cities (over 200 cases) are assigned 350 cases each. *Cases/establishments* is the ratio of *midpoint cases* to the number of establishments for which employment data was collected by the WMC in July 1944 (the *establishments* variable). The *FEPC office* variable is an indicator for the presence of a FEPC office in a particular city. The *earnings premium* variable measures the annual earnings premium associated with employment in defense-related industries, controlling for region, education, and potential experience. Population 1940 is expressed in millions.

Sources: The 1944 nonwhite/white defense employment ratio and the number of establishments reporting employment figures are taken from the WMC's "Summary of ES-270 Reports: July 1944," which can be found on microfilm roll #70 of the FEPC headquarters records. The corresponding value for 1940 and *defense/total employment* are estimated using the 1940 IPUMS. The 1940 nonwhite/white population ratio is from the published 1940 Census tables. Caseload figures are from the *First Report* of the FEPC. NAACP membership data are from the organization's *Annual Report* in 1943. The values of war contracts are taken from the War Production Board's *Summary of War Supply Contracts by Industrial Area* (1944).

employment figures for ES-270 reporting firms by race and sex for individual "labor markets" (approximately metropolitan areas).¹⁰ This city-

narrowly defined war industries. Establishments in the ES-270 Reports were selected by "their manpower problems, essentiality of activity, size of firm, or importance to the community in which they operate." (WMC, July 1944).

¹⁰ The reports provide nonwhite, white, male, and female employment levels, but not nonwhite male employment

level data can be combined with information from the 1940 Census and the FEPC caseload reports in an effort to detect the impact of FEPC intervention by looking across cities. The basic empirical strategy is to estimate the correlation between the FEPC caseload measures and the

versus nonwhite female employment, and so on. Therefore, all subsequent analysis includes both males and females.

change in the nonwhite/white employment ratio in defense-related industries, controlling for a number of city characteristics which are summarized in unweighted form in Table 1 and described below.

I use an ES-270 summary to calculate the nonwhite/white defense-related employment ratio for each area in July 1944. In the absence of ES-270 Reports for the early 1940's, I use the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) to estimate the same ratio for each metropolitan area in 1940 (Steven Ruggles et al., 1997). The ratio's change from 1940 to 1944 ($\Delta(NW/W)_{defense\ 1940-44}$) is the dependent variable in the regressions that follow.¹¹ The estimate of 1940's nonwhite/white defense employment ratio ($(NW/W)_{1940\ defense}$) is entered separately in the regressions as a control variable because, ceteris paribus, cities beginning with relatively low nonwhite/white defense employment ratios will tend to experience relatively large increases in that ratio as labor shifts from nondefense to defense industries.

I also use the IPUMS to calculate the proportion of all workers in an area who were working in defense-related industries in 1940 (*defense/total employment*), and this provides a useful characterization of each area's prewar industrial structure.¹² Cities with proportionately large war-industry sectors experienced relatively large demand-side shocks and relatively tight labor markets, and consequently employers might have been more likely to tap "new" sources of labor, including blacks, even in the absence of the executive orders. The value of defense contracts, a more direct measure of such demand-side forces, is incorporated below.

To account for differences in cities' racial compositions, I use the published Census vol-

umes to calculate the nonwhite/white population ratio in each metropolitan area in 1940 ($(NW/W)_{1940\ population}$). Ceteris paribus, cities with larger nonwhite/white ratios in the population will tend to have larger increases in the nonwhite/white ratio in defense employment as workers are drawn into defense-related firms. This relative elasticity of the nonwhite labor supply to defense industries could be amplified by a migration process in which current residents encourage and facilitate the movement of friends and relatives.

The *First Report* of the FEPC includes a map which categorizes labor-market areas according to their volume of docketed complaints from July 1943 through June 1944, the Second Committee's first full year of operation. A complaint received by the Committee was docketed when it was a signed complaint against a named employer, union, or government agency alleging discrimination relating to employment, placement, or training because of race, creed, color, or national origin (FEPC, 1945 p. 18). Approximately 81 percent of the cases docketed were related to racial discrimination and 9 percent were related to religious discrimination, primarily against Jews (FEPC, 1945 p. 118). New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Philadelphia were the largest suppliers of FEPC cases with each city generating more than 200. Unfortunately, it is impossible to tell how many of the docketed cases received "satisfactory adjustments" in each city, and so the total number of docketed cases is used in the regressions. The map's categorization of the labor-market areas is transformed into a series of indicator variables for the sake of empirical analysis. Because large cities will tend to generate more complaints than small ones, a measure of each city's total population in 1940 is included in the regressions.¹³

It is evident from both the detailed records of investigations and from the sheer volume of complaints that many firms and unions did not heed Executive Orders 8802 and 9346 on their own accord. This is not too surprising given that there were perceived costs to integration but virtually no penalties for *initial* noncompliance.

¹¹ This dependent variable is similar to that used by Leonard (1984). He uses the change in the black share of total employment in a sample of firms from 1974 to 1980. The nonwhite/white estimate for 1940 is expected to be more accurate for larger cities because it relies on a sample of Census data. Therefore, the regressions weight observations by the square root of the number of IPUMS observations extracted for each city. Results are similar if weights are not used.

¹² To keep the measure consistent with the ES-270 coverage, all workers in manufacturing, government, transportation, and mining industries are counted as defense-related workers.

¹³ Using the total black population or the total number of establishments submitting ES-270 reports instead of total population does not change the results.

If FEPC intervention was effective, then it should have caused a larger-than-average increase in the black employment share of those establishments. As long as such firms hired some blacks from outside the city's defense-related industries, FEPC interventions at the firm level should be evident at the city level as well.¹⁴ Maloney (1994) and Margo (1995) highlight the importance of the movement of black workers into manufacturing, transportation, and government employment during the 1940's. Did the FEPC actually help black workers make this transition?

III. Did the FEPC Matter?

Table 2 reports regressions of the change in the nonwhite/white ratio of employment in defense industries on the city characteristics and the FEPC caseload variables. The form of the regression specification is heavily influenced by the form of data available. For example, the caseload variable is available only in categorical form and is entered in columns (1) to (3) as such, where the omitted category is zero cases. Alternative specifications are offered below for the sake of testing the robustness of the connection between the caseload variable and relative employment gains for blacks. As expected, the coefficient on $(NW/W)_{1940\text{ defense}}$ indicates that for a given nonwhite/white ratio in the population, cities starting with relatively high proportions of blacks in defense industries had relatively small increases in that proportion during the war. Likewise, as expected, the coefficients on $(NW/W)_{1940\text{ population}}$ and $defense/total\ employment$ are positive.

The coefficient estimates on the caseload variables are also positive and generally increase in size and significance as the number of cases rises in column (1). It is possible, however, that omitted variables are responsible for generating both a large number of complaints and a relatively large increase in nonwhite employment. For example, if organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and Urban League

were effective at pressuring local employers to hire black workers and also created an environment within which complaints to the FEPC were frequent, then it is possible that the relationship between FEPC complaints and the change in the nonwhite/white employment ratio is overstated. If, however, organizations like the NAACP used the FEPC as an instrument to change local employment practices (that is, the organizations' effect on employment was not independent of the FEPC), then the estimates in column (1) still would be appropriate.

The NAACP *Annual Report* for 1943 provides categorical data on membership which allows some exploration of this issue (p. 31).¹⁵ The membership data are entered into the regression analysis of column (2) where the omitted category is membership of less than 500 persons. Evidently, NAACP membership is a poor predictor of changes in the nonwhite/white employment ratio. The coefficient estimates are all small and statistically insignificant. The FEPC caseload variables, on the other hand, remain positive. Of course, this does not imply that the FEPC was in any sense more important than the NAACP in promoting black employment during the war. In fact, it is likely that the FEPC would never have come into existence but for the efforts of groups like the NAACP, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the National Urban League, the National Negro Congress, and at the grassroots level, black churches.

Another potentially important city characteristic is added to column (3). Although the measure of the proportion of all workers in defense-related industries in 1940 should be well correlated with the magnitude of subsequent wartime labor-demand shocks, column (3) includes a measure of cumulative government defense contracts (in billions of current dollars) in case omitted demand-side factors are driving the correlation between black employment gains and FEPC cases in columns (1) and (2).¹⁶

¹⁵ Detroit had the largest branch by far with over 20,000 members, and other large branches were located in Baltimore, Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, Los Angeles, Houston, and Washington, DC.

¹⁶ The contract figures are taken from the War Production Board's (1944) *Summary of War Supply Contracts by Industrial Area*, Table 3. Figures are not available for some of the cities and so the sample size decreases.

¹⁴ If a defense-industry firm hired black workers away from another defense-industry firm in the city, then there would be no visible change in black employment in defense industries at the city level, and the FEPC would appear to be ineffective by that standard of measurement.

TABLE 2—FEPC CASES AND CHANGE IN NONWHITE/WHITE DEFENSE EMPLOYMENT, 1940–1944

	(1) OLS	(2) OLS	(3) OLS	(4) OLS	(5) OLS
<i>(NW/W)</i> _{1940 defense}	-0.5548 (0.0922)	-0.5382 (0.0928)	-0.4163 (0.1070)	-0.4987 (0.0913)	-0.5683 (0.0933)
<i>(NW/W)</i> _{1940 population}	0.2519 (0.0601)	0.2396 (0.0607)	0.1297 (0.0801)	0.2329 (0.0597)	0.2829 (0.0606)
Defense/total employment	0.0699 (0.0481)	0.0747 (0.0481)	0.1838 (0.0702)	0.0686 (0.0487)	0.1139 (0.0492)
Caseload 1–9	0.0014 (0.0115)	0.0040 (0.0117)	0.0117 (0.0139)	—	—
Caseload 10–49	0.0360 (0.0123)	0.0354 (0.0137)	0.0523 (0.0176)	—	—
Caseload 50–99	0.0268 (0.0156)	0.0208 (0.0183)	0.0411 (0.0201)	—	—
Caseload 100–199	0.0504 (0.0198)	0.0380 (0.0238)	0.0562 (0.0496)	—	—
Caseload 200+	0.0956 (0.0218)	0.0926 (0.0235)	0.1053 (0.0283)	—	—
Midpoint cases	—	—	—	0.0003 (0.0001)	—
Cases/establishments	—	—	—	—	0.0482 (0.0127)
(Cases/establishments) ²	—	—	—	—	-0.0090 (0.0029)
NAACP 500–999	—	-0.0103 (0.0112)	0.0056 (0.0137)	—	—
NAACP 1000–2499	—	-0.0066 (0.0131)	0.0025 (0.0136)	—	—
NAACP 2500+	—	0.0140 (0.0150)	0.0183 (0.0164)	—	—
War contracts	—	—	-0.0002 (0.0040)	—	—
South	-0.0107 (0.0140)	-0.0062 (0.0143)	-0.0007 (0.0186)	-0.0104 (0.0140)	-0.0187 (0.0143)
West	0.0020 (0.0151)	0.0075 (0.0155)	0.0127 (0.0190)	0.0034 (0.0155)	0.0118 (0.0146)
North Central	0.0106 (0.0094)	0.0119 (0.0095)	0.0137 (0.0097)	0.0091 (0.0095)	0.0099 (0.0096)
Population 1940	-0.0097 (0.0040)	-0.0114 (0.0041)	-0.0107 (0.0044)	-0.0120 (0.0052)	—
Constant	-0.0216 (0.0279)	-0.0246 (0.0280)	-0.0881 (0.0405)	-0.0143 (0.0257)	-0.0416 (0.0259)
Mean dependent variable	0.0130	0.0130	0.0147	0.0130	0.0130
Weighted mean dependent variable	0.0248	0.0248	0.0276	0.0248	0.0248
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	0.42	0.42	0.53	0.39	0.34
Observations	129	129	85	129	129

Notes: The dependent variable is the change in the ratio of nonwhite/white defense-related employment from 1940 to 1944 as described in the text. *Population 1940* is expressed in millions of people and *war contracts* is expressed in billions of current dollars. Omitted indicator variable categories are: zero FEPC cases, NAACP membership under 500, and the Northeast region. Regressions weight city-level observations by the square root of the number of 1940 IPUMS observations extracted for the construction of *defense/total employment*. Standard errors are in parentheses.

Sources: Sources are the same as in Table 1.

The contract variable's coefficient is not significantly different from zero, and the FEPC caseload variables remain strongly positive.

In assessing the reliability of the coefficient estimates on the FEPC caseload variables, the direction of causality also must be questioned. Suppose that blacks encountered no resistance to their entry into defense industries in a particular city, but that once hired, they encountered considerable resistance to their promotion or training. In this scenario, black employment would rise, but so would complaints about discriminatory promotion and on-the-job training policies. Although this line of reasoning is plausible, complaints about "refusal to hire" far outweighed complaints about "refusal to upgrade" and "discriminatory working conditions" at the national level (FEPC, 1944 p. 132). Moreover, having proportionally more blacks in defense-type jobs in 1940 (one proxy for the ease of entry) did not increase the subsequent number of complaints to the FEPC. The number of FEPC cases (midpoint of range) is negatively and statistically insignificantly related to $(NW/W)_{1940\text{ defense}}$ after controlling for region, city size, and the nonwhite/white population ratio.

Another potential bias to the estimates would work in the opposite direction. A city in which blacks moved easily into defense-related industries might have generated fewer complaints than one with a considerable reluctance to hiring blacks in this set of industries. In this case, a negative association would tend to emerge between $\Delta(NW/W)_{\text{defense } 1940-44}$ and complaints to the FEPC. Essentially, "resistance" is an omitted variable which could be positively correlated with complaints and negatively correlated with nonwhite/white employment growth. Alternatively, however, blacks might have been less likely to complain about discrimination in places where resistance to black hiring was strongest or most uniform. In this case, the FEPC variable's coefficient would be positively biased because blacks would complain more in places where the underlying local employment norms were already more liberal.¹⁷

¹⁷ Table 1, however, shows that the number of cases per defense-related establishment in the South exceeded that in the non-South. Because the FEPC often bundled together multiple complaints against a single employer (FEPC, 1945 p. 18), it appears that this *cases/establishments* ratio is a

The use of a first-differenced dependent variable might help eliminate some unobserved city-specific characteristics, and the inclusion of regional indicator variables might help control for differences in resistance across regions. Nonetheless, all of these potential biases recommend the search for an instrumental variable for the number of cases undertaken in each city.

A simple model of caseload generation supposes that blacks seeking employment in a given city randomly apply to one employer (either E_D or E_{ND} depending on whether it is a defense-related firm or not) per time period. The expected number of complaints lodged in a particular city (in that time period) then depends on the number of black workers seeking employment (A), the proportion of employers covered by the executive order ($E_D/(E_D + E_{ND})$), the probability of a defense employer refusing to hire a qualified black applicant (P_D), the expected benefits from filing a complaint with the FEPC (B), and the cost of complaining (C), perhaps in the form of effort or potential retribution. Algebraically, $A[E_D/(E_D + E_{ND})]P_D$ gives the number of black applicants to defense firms who are denied employment. Out of this pool, the number of complaints filed depends on the proportion of the denied workers for whom the expected discounted benefit of complaint exceeds the cost.

For each city, the number of defense establishments filing ES-270 reports in 1944 (which corresponds to E_D and increases the expected number of complaints), the presence of a local FEPC office (which effectively lowers the cost of complaint), and the city-specific annual earnings premium associated with war-type industry employment in 1940 (which raises the expected benefits of complaint) can all be used in a two-stage least-squares framework to instrument for the number of cases docketed in each city (after transforming the caseload variables from a series of indicators into a single variable, *midpoint cases*, equal to the relevant category's midpoint).¹⁸ The two-stage least-squares results are

more useful measure of FEPC activity than, say, *cases/black population*.

¹⁸ The city-specific war industry earnings premium is estimated in a series of regressions of the log of annual wage and salary income of employed men (aged 18 to 65)

reported in column (4) of Table 2, and the caseload variable remains significant, positive, and rather large. In fact, this two-stage least-squares estimate is slightly larger than that obtained from a similar specification (not shown) run using OLS and the *midpoint cases* variable (0.00030 versus 0.00026), suggesting that the net effect of the potential biases discussed above is negative. The implied first stage of the two-stage least-squares procedure reveals that each of the instruments is positively correlated with the caseload variable, and the coefficients on both the *FEPC office* and the *establishments* variables are statistically significant.¹⁹ This bolsters one's confidence in the appropriateness of the instruments.

Finally, column (5) of Table 2 offers yet another specification. This time the *midpoint cases* value is divided by the number of establishments filing ES-270 reports with the WMC in July 1944. This *cases/establishments* variable and its square are both statistically significant, and over the relevant range of values indicate a positive FEPC effect.

IV. The Magnitude and Persistence of the FEPC's Effect

It appears that direct government intervention helped blacks enter industries, firms, and occu-

pations that otherwise might have remained closed to them. A simple, if rough, counterfactual takes the coefficients estimated in column (1) of Table 2 as given and estimates what the nonwhite/white employment ratio in each city's defense-related industries would have been in 1944 if the caseload variables are all set to zero. In the absence of FEPC intervention (and supposing that the level of white employment in each city in 1944 would have been at its actual level), the results suggest that the nonwhite/white employment ratio would have been only 0.056 rather than its actual value of 0.092 in 1944 in these cities. This is only a slight increase in the ratio from 1940's value of 0.048. In other words, the counterfactual suggests that total nonwhite employment in war-related industries might have been about 60 percent of its actual level in 1944—hardly a “dismal failure” of policy.²⁰ The coefficient estimated in the two-stage least-squares procedure again implies that there would have been a rather slight rise in the ratio of nonwhite to white employment (from 0.048 to 0.061) between 1940 and 1944 without the intervention of the FEPC. The specification in column (5) that employs the *cases/establishments* measure implies a smaller, but still sizable, impact of FEPC intervention on nonwhite employment in war industries by suggesting a nonwhite/white employment ratio of 0.073 in 1944 in the “no FEPC” counterfactual compared to the actual ratio of 0.092.

Finally, an even more modest measure of FEPC impact is estimated by restricting the dependent variable to the period of November 1, 1943 to July 1, 1944 (for which I have ES-270 summaries) as opposed to the entire 1940 to 1944 period. The shorter period more closely coincides with the time frame in which the caseload variable is

on potential experience (age - years of education - 5) and its square, years of education and its square, a race dummy, and a defense-related industry dummy (which equals one for manufacturing, mining, transportation, and government employment). Black specific regressions are often impossible given the number observations for each city. Andrea H. Beller (1978) uses a similar “office” variable as an instrument in a study of federal antidiscrimination policy, but Donohue and Heckman (1991 p. 1636) question the exogeneity of this kind of instrument. Reed (1991 p. 207) suggests that the establishment of some FEPC offices (Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Detroit) was endogenous to the caseload in that area. Resetting the *FEPC office* variable to zero for these cities has a small effect on the coefficient estimate for *midpoint cases*.

¹⁹ The coefficients and standard errors (in parentheses) from the implicit first-stage regression are: *FEPC office* = 75.37 (13.19); *earnings premium* = 47.11 (46.38); *establishments* = 0.2604 (0.04451); $(NW/W)_{1940\text{ defense}}$ = -7.384 (104.2); $(NW/W)_{1940\text{ population}}$ = 45.35 (67.46); *defense/total employment* = -7.867 (54.76); 1940 *population* (in millions) = 27.3 (3.81); *South* = -12.46 (15.81); *North Central* = -15.89 (12.07); *West* = 22.36 (16.76); constant = -18.63 (30.29).

²⁰ This figure is calculated as follows: first, I estimate the counterfactual “no FEPC” 1944 nonwhite/white defense employment ratio as $(NW/W)_{1944\text{ defense}} + \Delta(NW/W)_{\text{defense } 1940-44} - \beta_{\text{caseload}} \text{caseload}$, where *caseload* is the relevant measure of FEPC cases in a city and β_{caseload} is the coefficient estimate. Second, I fix the level of white employment at its 1944 level, and then calculate the level of nonwhite employment which would make the counterfactual nonwhite/white ratio hold; third, I sum this counterfactual nonwhite employment level over all the cities in the sample. This must be regarded as a rough counterfactual because the procedure generates implausibly low estimates for some cities.

TABLE 3—FEPC CASES AND CHANGE IN NONWHITE/WHITE DEFENSE EMPLOYMENT, NON-SOUTH AND SOUTH, 1940–1944

	(1) Non-South	(2) Non-South	(3) South	(4) South
$(NW/W)_{1940\text{ defense}}$	-0.3821 (0.2394)	-0.4923 (0.2417)	-0.5360 (0.1609)	-0.4430 (0.1544)
$(NW/W)_{1940\text{ population}}$	0.2935 (0.0896)	0.5165 (0.0939)	0.2270 (0.1104)	0.1695 (0.1080)
Defense/total employment	0.0904 (0.0320)	0.1451 (0.0311)	0.0867 (0.1171)	0.0933 (0.1238)
Caseload 1–9	0.0119 (0.0069)	—	-0.0163 (0.0330)	—
Caseload 10–49	0.0402 (0.0077)	—	-0.0088 (0.0348)	—
Caseload 50–99	0.0422 (0.0097)	—	-0.0774 (0.0503)	—
Caseload 100–199	0.0441 (0.0117)	—	—	—
Caseload 200+	0.0982 (0.0119)	—	—	—
Cases/establishments	—	0.0528 (0.0077)	—	-0.0012 (0.0394)
$(\text{Cases/establishments})^2$	—	-0.0135 (0.0017)	—	0.0009 (0.0108)
West	0.0120 (0.0089)	0.0221 (0.0080)	—	—
North Central	0.0091 (0.0051)	0.0078 (0.0050)	—	—
Population 1940	-0.0093 (0.0021)	—	0.218 (0.120)	—
Constant	-0.0460 (0.0188)	-0.0732 (0.0164)	-0.0371 (0.0552)	-0.0164 (0.0543)
Mean dependent variable	0.0247	0.0247	-0.0104	-0.0104
Weighted mean dependent variable	0.0347	0.0347	-0.00415	-0.00415
Adjusted R^2	0.70	0.65	0.23	0.16
Observations	86	86	43	43

Notes: The dependent variable is the change in the ratio of nonwhite/white defense-related employment from 1940 to 1944. Omitted indicator variable categories are: zero FEPC cases and the Northeast region. Regressions weight city-level observations by the square root of the number of 1940 IPUMS observations extracted for the construction of *defense/total employment*. Standard errors are in parentheses.

Sources: Sources are the same as in Table 1.

measured (July 1, 1943 to June 30, 1944) and in which the Second Committee was most active in settling complaints. The coefficient estimates (which remain significant but are not shown) from a specification similar to that in column (1) imply that the nonwhite/white employment ratio would have been 0.078 rather than 0.092 in 1944. Even this is far from a trivial difference when seen in the context of a large labor force, and this might be considered a lower bound estimate of the

FEPC's impact because it entirely excludes the activities and accomplishments of the First Committee as well as the first four months of the Second Committee's operation. Since the geographic dispersion of the First and Second Committee's activities appear to have been positively correlated, it seems likely that the original "large" estimates (from Table 2) captured some of the effect of the First Committee's efforts.

Table 3 splits the sample into southern and

nonsouthern cities and reports OLS regression results that reveal substantial differences across regions in the coefficient estimates. Although in the nonsouthern sample the caseload variables' coefficients remain positive and significant, they are insignificant in the southern sample. This finding is consistent with the FEPC's *Final Report*, which discusses the difficulty the FEPC had operating in the South, and which emphasizes the lack of cooperation provided by local WMC and U.S. Employment Service personnel (FEPC, 1946 p. 34). As a relatively small government agency, the FEPC relied on the cooperation of more powerful federal institutions to implement the antidiscrimination executive orders. Without this support, and given both the staunch southern opposition to the FEPC's goals and the federal government's unwillingness to force racial equality on the South, it is not surprising that the FEPC was ineffective there.²¹ In fact, given the FEPC's own admission of ineffectiveness in the region, a finding of a positive effect in the South in Table 3 would have cast doubt on the validity of this paper's empirical strategy.

Wartime labor demand and the FEPC combined to substantially increase the proportion of blacks in broadly defined defense-related industries, outside of the South at least. But did this industrial redistribution persist in the postwar era, or was the FEPC effect ephemeral? The ratio of black to white workers in broadly defined war-type industries did not decline between 1944 and 1950. Summed over the 129 cities in the sample, the nonwhite/white ratio in 1950 was approximately 0.091. Thus, on net, blacks did not exit this set of industries any faster than whites, and to the extent that the FEPC boosted this ratio during the war, its work does not appear to have been undone in the reconversion.

Using the IPUMS and matching cities in the 1940 and 1950 Census, it is possible to test directly whether the FEPC had a lasting imprint

on the industrial distribution of black workers. Table 4 reports OLS regressions of the change in the nonwhite/white employment ratio in defense-related industries on a familiar set of variables. The full sample in column (1) yields a positive and significant coefficient on the *cases/establishments* measure, but the coefficient is substantially smaller than in column (5) of Table 2.²² The implied "no FEPC" counterfactual nonwhite/white employment ratio in war-type industries in 1950 is 0.077. Interestingly, the coefficient on the initial *defense/total employment* variable, which should proxy for the size of city-level wartime demand shocks, is also smaller in magnitude in Table 4 than in Table 2. Thus, both the FEPC and wartime labor-demand impacts faded somewhat over the course of the decade, but neither one vanished. Columns (2) and (3) of Table 4 separate the sample into nonsouthern and southern cities. Again, it is clear that the FEPC was much more effective outside the South than inside.

Despite its apparent effectiveness, or perhaps because of it, the FEPC's political existence was always precarious, and its activities were severely curtailed in the summer of 1945 when its budget was slashed. The FEPC officially expired with the issuance of its *Final Report* in June 1946, and efforts to promote permanent federal FEPC legislation were defeated, though several nonsouthern states adopted their own antidiscrimination laws and agencies based on the FEPC model.²³

V. Conclusion

Myrdal argued that "the more the Negroes gain during the present war boom, the more will they have advanced themselves permanently" (1944 p. 423). Indeed, over the course of the twentieth century, African Americans gained considerable economic ground in both absolute

²¹ Note, however, that in 1940 blacks were already employed (in the lowest skill categories) in many defense-related industries in the South, and the FEPC was often seeking to have blacks upgraded *within* industries as opposed to having them enter new ones (FEPC, 1946 p. 33). Such upgrading might not be reflected in Table 3 where the dependent variable measures change in employment rather than change in status.

²² Specifications using two-stage least-squares or caseload dummy variables (as in Table 2) also yield estimates of a significantly positive FEPC effect outside the South.

²³ According to Ruchames (1953 p. 165), the first states to establish antidiscrimination legislation and enforcement agencies included New York (1945), New Jersey (1945), Massachusetts (1946), Connecticut (1947), New Mexico (1949), Oregon (1949), Rhode Island (1949), and Washington (1949).

TABLE 4—FEPC CASES AND CHANGE IN NONWHITE/WHITE DEFENSE EMPLOYMENT, 1940–1950

	(1) United States	(2) Non-South	(3) South
$(NW/W)_{1940\text{ defense}}$	-0.4999 (0.0749)	-0.3358 (0.2247)	-0.4075 (0.1244)
$(NW/W)_{1940\text{ workers}}$	0.3821 (0.0486)	0.4578 (0.0873)	0.2973 (0.0869)
Defense/total employment	0.0390 (0.0395)	0.0770 (0.0289)	-0.0218 (0.0997)
Cases/establishments	0.0307 (0.0102)	0.0349 (0.0072)	0.0062 (0.0317)
$(\text{Cases/establishments})^2$	-0.0048 (0.0023)	-0.0071 (0.0015)	-0.0030 (0.0087)
South	-0.0309 (0.0115)	—	—
West	0.0072 (0.0117)	0.0158 (0.0075)	—
North Central	0.0148 (0.0077)	0.0140 (0.0047)	—
Constant	-0.0138 (0.0208)	-0.0420 (0.0152)	0.0018 (0.0437)
Mean dependent variable	0.0245	0.0253	0.0229
Weighted mean dependent variable	0.0324	0.0338	0.0283
Adjusted R^2	0.40	0.70	0.18
Observations	129	86	43

Notes: The dependent variable is the change in the nonwhite/white defense-related employment ratio from 1940 and 1950 in each city. The Northeast is the omitted regional category. Regressions weight city-level observations by the square root of the number of 1940 IPUMS observations extracted for the construction of *defense/total employment*. Standard errors are in parentheses.

Sources: The 1940 and 1950 nonwhite/white ratios are estimated using the IPUMS. Other sources are the same as in Table 1.

and relative terms, and no decade witnessed more rapid progress than the 1940's. For the last 25 years, however, the economics literature has focused primarily on the post-Civil Rights Act era and has left consideration of the 1940's to the side. By doing so, the literature has missed an opportunity to study the design, evolution, and effectiveness of antidiscrimination policy over a longer time span.

Black men in war-related industries earned a sizable premium over comparable men working outside those industries, but their entry into such jobs was often blocked. The FEPC, without direct recourse to penalties, was surprisingly effective in its efforts to promote Roosevelt's antidiscrimination policy outside of the South, though the Committee appears to have been powerless in the South. FEPC intervention altered the racial balance some firms struck in their hiring decisions by (1) providing advice on how to integrate the workplace, (2) giving man-

agers a ready excuse for hiring blacks if white workers objected, (3) threatening to bring more powerful government agencies into the fray on the side of the FEPC, and/or (4) publicly embarrassing firms and unions that refused to hire blacks. Methods (1) and (2) both lowered the expected cost of integration associated with strikes or other work disruptions whereas methods (3) and (4) raised the cost of not complying with FEPC directives. Furthermore, it is possible that intervention at one firm could have had spillover effects on others' hiring practices by altering local norms regarding the racial division of labor.

Historically, it has been rare for black and white workers with the same job in the same firm to be paid different wages (Robert Higgs, 1977; Christopher Foote et al., 1999). Rather, differences in the geographic, industrial, occupational, and firm-level distributions of black and white workers have accounted for

much of the income gap between the groups. Deep historical roots anchored these different distributions, and discriminatory hiring practices reinforced them (William A. Sundstrom, 1994). The FEPC appears to have accelerated the pace of black economic advancement by challenging these discriminatory practices and opening doors for black workers in industries, occupations, and firms that had previously excluded them.

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