

WORLD WAR II RECORDS ON THE HOME FRONT

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The enormous effort to mobilize the industrial capacity of the United States to support the work of the men fighting World War II led to the creation of a number of government agencies. These offices were charged with various responsibilities regarding mobilization of labor, pricing, rent control, job discrimination and many other issues. This paper will highlight the following records held at the National Archives-Southeast Region (NA-SE) for three government agencies: the Committee on Fair Employment Practice (RG 228), the War Manpower Commission (RG 211), and the Office of Price Administration (RG 188).

First, some background on the FEPC. Early in the defense period preceding America's entry into World War II, it became obvious that full mobilization of American manpower in industry would not be realized without government intervention on behalf of the nation's minority workers. To help integrate these individuals - numbering about 30 million members - into the war effort, the government began to announce some policies of nondiscrimination. These early efforts did not satisfy prominent black leaders, and, early in 1941, one of them, A. Philip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, AFL, urged that blacks march on Washington to protest discrimination and demand that African Americans be given greater employment opportunities in defense industries. The march was scheduled for July

1941, but after a series of hurried conferences between black leaders and government officials, the march was called off.

Executive Order 8802, prohibiting discrimination in government and defense industries, because of race, creed, color, or national origin, was issued on 25 June 1941. The first Committee on Fair Employment Practices was established in the Office of Production Management. The committee was assigned to the War Production Board when that agency succeeded the OPM and still later was transferred to the War Manpower Commission in 1942.

The principal achievement of the first FEPC was publicizing the need for government support in the field of fair employment practices through a number of public hearings of complaints of discrimination. The committee was not very effective under the War Manpower Commission and urged that it be established as an independent agency. On 27 May 1943, President Roosevelt abolished the old committee and created a new FEPC in the Office for Emergency Management. The committee formulated and interpreted policies to combat racial and religious discrimination in employment; received, investigated, and adjusted complaints of such discrimination; and assisted government agencies, employers and labor unions with problems of discrimination.

The field offices were established in late 1943. The NA-SE has records for Region VII (7), headquartered in Atlanta, which was established 3 November 1943, and included Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, Florida, and Mississippi.

The committee's jurisdiction extended to three classes of complaints: (1) complaints against agencies of the Federal government, (2) complaints against all employers, and the unions of their employees, having contracts with the Federal

government that contained a nondiscrimination clause, whether or not these contracts pertained to the war effort; and (3) complaints against all employers, and the unions of their employees, engaged in the production of war materials or in activities necessary for the maintenance of such production.

To be entitled to consideration, a complaint had to allege discrimination relating to hiring or employment. The committee had no enforcement powers whereby it could require compliance with its decisions, but depended on powers of persuasion. In some cases it made agreements with the agencies for carrying out the nondiscrimination policy. Thus violation of a war contractor's obligations, brought to the attention of the proper contracting agency, might result in cancellation of the contract or in failure to renew it.

All cases were filed in the regional office of the area in which the alleged discrimination occurred. When a docketable complaint was received, the fair practice examiner interviewed the complainant, and, if he was satisfied that a prima facie case was made, he visited the party charged. If an employer or union official - having been reminded of his responsibilities under Executive Order 9346 - complied with the recommendations of the examiner and the Regional Director, the case was closed. About 95% of the complaints submitted to the FEPC were adjusted by the regional offices, and the 5% not settled by the regional staff were referred to the central office.

The records held by the NA-SE consist of two types: the general office files of the Regional Director and case files. The general office files are arranged alphabetically by subject or type of material and include correspondence, memoranda, reports, press releases, speeches and newspaper clippings relating to investigations by regional personnel of war plants charged with unfair

employment practices, information about programs undertaken by minority groups in support of FEPC policies, and statistical information on caseload activity.

The case files are divided into active and closed cases. Both are arranged alphabetically by name of party charged. A handwritten list of the active and closed cases prepared by an intern is available. The active cases were those that had not been satisfactorily settled or dismissed for lack of merit when the FEPC disbanded. The closed cases had been disposed of either by a satisfactory settlement or by dismissal for lack of merit. There are seven archives boxes of administrative files, two boxes of active cases, and nine boxes of closed cases.

These files have been used by several researchers for documentation of discrimination problems during WW II including Dr. Merl Reed, who used them for his book, *Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement* (1991).

The War Manpower Commission (RG 211), was established within the Office of Emergency Management by an Executive Order of 18 April 1942. Operating through regional and state WMC offices and local offices of the U. S. Employment Service, it recruited labor for the war effort and essential civilian industries, trained labor for essential jobs, analyzed manpower utilization practices to increase labor efficiency, and accumulated national labor market information. It was terminated by an Executive Order of 19 September 1945, and its functions were transferred to the U. S. Employment Service.

The regional office for region 7 was established in Atlanta, GA, in 1942. It administered commission activities in the states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Tennessee.

The records are arranged in twenty-three different series and folder title lists are available for all of these files,

about 90 ft. in all. Descriptions of some of the more significant series follow.

The Central Correspondence Files contain copies of correspondence from State War Manpower directors to area supervisors and correspondence between state and regional manpower directors thus given somewhat of an overview of the agency's work. There are 8 ft. of these files arranged by topic.

Minutes and Decisions of Regional and Essential Committees includes correspondence from companies and state federations of labor on various war manpower problems, contracts for war industry by states, and minutes of Area and Regional Management and Labor Committees. These are arranged by city.

The WMC was concerned with areas which were impacted by an influx of defense workers and the subsequent need for additional housing. The Proposed Housing Construction files contain estimates of in-migration of war workers and lists of war defense industries. These files could be useful for an economic study of war production in the South. They are arranged by state and city.

One series used for exhibit information and which has also been used for research papers is entitled "Central Files and Monthly MOPAC Area Reports." (13 ft.) These include directives on labor mobilization and utilization, complaints about unauthorized labor recruiting, and appeals to the WMC. The files contain reports on utilization of women arranged by state and also information about the use of blacks and older workers. There are area manpower surveys for selected cities and monthly field operations reports by area directors.

Series 12, "Reports," contains information on in-migration to a large group of Southern cities. Also found are labor market and demand and supply reports for many cities. There are special one-time reports on specific

industries including cotton and peanut oil, steel, textiles, fertilizer, and structural clay products.

Series 16 includes regional, state and area press releases and radio scripts. There is extensive information on the Charleston Navy Yard recruitment campaign, and some information on recruitment of women. Also, newspaper clippings are included in these files.

Series 17 consists of speeches by members of the Regional Staff and also some more press releases and radio announcements.

The Training Service was geared toward providing training programs for priority war industries. The regional training staff maintained records concerned with union activities, on-the-job training, apprenticeship training, and training of women and blacks.

Series 20, entitled "Minority Discrimination Case Files," does not directly duplicate the FEPC files as these include internal War Manpower correspondence. These files could be used to supplement the information in the FEPC files.

Other series are concerned in more detail with providing housing for workers, the files of the Regional Director, selective service deferments, requests for clearance for individuals to migrate from one job to another, and activities of the Area Labor-Management Committees which assessed employment trends, labor needs and turnover, and determined priorities. These last are arranged by city.

In summary, the War Manpower Commission files contain a wealth of information on economic conditions in the South, defense industries, and manpower utilization considerations during World War II with some information about specific industries and specific plants and considerable information arranged by city.

The activities of the Office of Price Administration (RG 188) began in April 1941 with an office which, at first, used largely informal means to try (1) to prevent price spiraling, (2) to prevent speculative accumulation of materials, (3) to stimulate the provision of the necessary supply of materials for defense purposes, and (4) to establish plans for the equitable distribution of the remaining supply of materials among competing civilian demands.

By the fall of 1941, the need for a widespread enforcement and price government organization that could deal with the vast structure of American economic life was obvious. Imports were reduced, factories were converting to wartime production, and large amounts of essential commodities such as shoes, food, and gasoline were needed to supply the armed forces. The need for rationing became apparent.

Congress gave the OPA statutory recognition as an independent agency by the Emergency Price Control Act of 30 January 1942. Under this legislation the OPA continued to try to stabilize prices by establishing maximum prices for commodities (other than agricultural products which were under the control of the Secretary of Agriculture). The agency also established maximum amounts for rents in defense areas. In addition, the OPA began the rationing of essential commodities and authorized subsidies for the production of some goods. Most of these price and rationing controls were lifted between August 1945 and November 1946.

To implement this vast program which reached into virtually every home and business, a large bureaucracy was established with eight regional offices, which supervised the policies established in Washington, 93 district offices each responsible to its district office, and more than 5,600 War Price and Rationing Boards, usually called local boards, which were located throughout the country. These local

boards were staffed largely by volunteers in local communities.

The National Archives-Southeast Region holds the records from Region IV (4) encompassing the states of MS, AL, FL, GA, TN, N.C., S.C, and VA , with headquarters in Atlanta. These include 390 cu. ft. of OPA records, which include records of the Regional Office; some district offices; and selected records for the War Price and Rationing Boards. Charleston, SC, was selected by a sampling procedure to document the work of a local price control board. The archives holds documentation of every application and record presented to the Charleston board as well as minutes and correspondence of the board. Selected records for the boards of 15 representative cities in the Southeast are also in our holdings. These cities are Charleston, Atlanta, Jacksonville, Memphis, Mobile, Norfolk, Richmond, Savannah, Gadsden, Elizabethton, TN, Gastonia, NC, Jackson, MS, Knoxville, Lakeland, FL, and Winston-Salem, NC.

The following highlights the records of four specific departments of the Regional Office: Information, Price, Rationing, and Enforcement.

The Information Department was the public affairs arm of the OPA and issued all releases to the press, radio, magazines, or trade papers. The six ft. of these records include speeches, bulletins, publicity kits, press releases, editorial digests, radio scripts, and progress reports.

The Price Department had the primary responsibility for establishing maximum prices and supervising the price program in the field. At first these regulations were based on a price freeze principle but this was gradually replaced by specific regulations for certain commodities or groups of commodities.

The archives holds 204 ft. of Price Department records including records of the Regional Office. Among these are

correspondence with representative firms of the fertilizer, milk, textile, rubber, food and cotton ginning industries and docketed case files which contain a sample of applications for price adjustment or price determination, the analysis and supporting data, and a copy of the order and opinion. Holdings include Price Department district office records for Birmingham, Jacksonville, Miami, Atlanta, Jackson, MS, Raleigh, Columbia, SC, Memphis, Nashville and Richmond comprising case files and surveys related to prices of particular commodities such as milk, cotton, tobacco, coal, etc.

The Rationing Department was responsible for the rationing of such commodities as tires, automobiles, gasoline, stoves, typewriters, shoes, sugar, coffee, processed foods, meats, fish, and cheese. We hold 38 ft. of these records including regional progress reports and commodity files which are arranged alphabetically by commodity. The archives has selected similar records for 13 district offices.

The Enforcement Department had the power to institute criminal proceedings (prosecution by the Department of Justice), undertake civil suits, make damage settlements, and issue and require a license as a condition for selling any commodity subject to price control. The 19 ft. of the Region 4 records include reports of the district offices. There were 550 price regulations, 19 ration orders, and two basic rent regulations, a vast enforcement challenge.

This brief examination of the records the National Archives-Southeast Region holds from three of the major "home front" government agencies helps to give a picture of the enormous complexity of the civilian apparatus established to support the work of the military in World War II. Readers are encouraged to investigate these records for yourselves and to advise students of their availability.