Classmate response

During WWII, “work in wartime industry and service in the armed forces, combined with the ideals of democracy,”[1] undoubtedly “spawned a new civil rights agenda at home that forever transformed American life.” [2] Historians agree, by the end of WWII in 1945, “civil rights became a national issue for the first time since the Reconstruction era”[3]. Yet, despite policy changes such as Executive Order 8802, “the lives of black men and women were little improved when the war ended.”[4] Moreover, violence against the African American community increased at astounding rates.

The violence experienced post WWII is most directly attributed to policy changes instating civil rights and liberties to the “fifteen millions or more of native-born”[5] African Americans residing in the U.S. post WWII. In response to the violence, “representatives of the African American community turned to the United Nations, W. E. B. DuBois”[6] who, with a team of lawyers, penned “An Appeal to the World: A Statement of Denial of A Statement of Denial of Human Rights to Minorities in the Case of Citizens of Negro Descent in the United States of America and an Appeal to the United Nations for Redress”.

Notably, DuBois wrote, “If however the effect of the color caste system on the American Negro has been both good and bad, its effect on white America has been disastrous.”[7] As evidenced by this sentiment, DuBois feared the continued abuse of African Americans was a threat to the entire nation’s moral and ethical construct. That is, “a nation which boldly declared “All men equal,” proceeded to build its economy on chattel slavery; masters who declared race-mixture impossible, sold their own children into slavery and left a mulatto progeny which neither law nor science can today disentangle; churches which excused slavery as calling the heathen to God, refused to recognize the freedom of converts or admit them to equal communion.”[8] As later stated by DuBois, these actions were in direct contradiction to the rights provided to all citizens under the Constitution – Article I Section 2, Article I Section 9, Article IV Section 2, Article XIII Section 1. Article XIV Section 1 and Article XV Section 1.[9]

In addition to DuBois' appeal, the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) was a pivotal document in the shift of human rights and liberties. In agreement with DuBois, the United Nations (UN) asserted, “disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind.”[10] That is to say, if violent and bigoted atrocities against one race are continuously accepted and permitted by one nation, the entire moral and ethical conscience of mankind is at risk. Case in point, Germany in WWII.

In conjunction with the UN and DuBois documents, the 1951 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) document, “We Charge Genocide”, further incited grave concerns over civil and human right abuses in the United States. Within this petition, the NAACP cited the UN’s definition of “genocide” as follows: “genocide as any killings on the basis of race, or, in it specific words, as “killing members of the group.”[11] It is based on this analysis of genocide that the NAACP found just cause to appeal to the UN “on behalf of the Negro people in the interest of peace and democracy, charging the Government of the United States of America with violation of the Charter of the United Nations and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide”[12]