

Reading Response 1

HIST 380

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These papers present the common theme of uneven application of democratic ideals during and immediately following WWII. Although the war was presented (truthfully) as a war against evil, some of the evils being fought against were occurring on the home front. Blacks were being discriminated against, locked out of meaningful military service and jobs in the mobilized industry, Italian, German and especially Japanese immigrants were interned at camps from fear of foreigners.

The first two readings are from African-Americans. Both express patriotism, Mr. Randolph says “We condemn all dictatorships, Fascist, Nazi and Communist. We are loyal, patriotic Americans all, ” Mr. Thompson echoes “Like all true Americans, my greatest desire at this time, this crucial point of our history; is a desire for a complete victory over the forces of evil.” However, both recognize the glaring problem confronting them: they are fighting for a continuation of a world in which they are second class citizens. Mr. Randolph calls his fellows to action, a march on Washington to pressure the president to issue an order integrating the Armed Forces. He understands that this might be construed as anti-American and counter to the war effort, but he points out that without reform, Blacks aren’t fighting for a better world. Mr. Thompson has the same issue.

The Executive Order 9066 highlights the same problem for a different set of people. America and its allies are fighting for freedom and to overthrow tyranny, but we are herding our residents (in some cases citizens) into camps because of the perceived threat they pose. Although this certainly isn’t to the level of abuse suffered at Nazi and Imperial Japanese hands, it is in the same vein.

Contrasting these problems are the speeches from FDR, Frank Capra, and later UN. FDR lays out how economic rights are as important to prevent dictatorship. He wants a broadly prosperous nation full of content, not likely to turn

to a demagogue, type people. However, he never mentions the racial issues that are burning the minorities of the nation. In the beginning of *Why We Fight*, the Secretary of War, Henry L. Stimson writes that he wants the U.S. to be seen as “a symbol of freedom” yet the basic freedoms of minorities are not addressed.

The minorities residing in the U.S. during and after WWII were poorly treated by a country claiming to be fighting for freedom worldwide. They rightfully expressed their disappointment that the country was spending inordinate effort to wage war across oceans while they were being ignored or oppressed at home.