Radio Fights Jim Crow

Transcript

Part One

Deborah Amos: This is an American RadioWorks special report: Radio Fights Jim Crow. I'm Deborah Amos. If you were a black American in the 1930s, two kinds of intolerance threatened you: Ferocious bigotry in the United States, and the lethal tide of fascism rising in Europe. As America prepared for war, your own government looked on you as a challenge to democracy, because the discrimination you endured revealed how shallow that democracy could be. Worried that racial unrest would erode home-front unity, the Roosevelt administration launched an unprecedented assault on prejudice over the radio. In the next hour, American RadioWorks correspondent Stephen Smith recalls the decade when radio fought Jim Crow.

Announcer: Let us raise a standard to which the wise and honest can repair.

Stephen Smith: This was the opening fanfare of American All, Immigrants All, a program that debuted on network radio in 1938. Each week for half a year, the program highlighted the attributes and history of different American ethnic group.

Announcer: With the Italians and the Jews of many nations, they provided the great mass of immigration that went into American manufacturing. They were section hands on the railroad, stone cutters, oyster fishermen, copper miners, textile workers. They manned the slaughterhouses, they worked in sugar refineries.

As quaint as parts of the program might sound now, Americans All was serious business. To begin with, it was a national radio show, and in the 1930s, America was a nation of listeners. Little more than a decade after radios were first mass produced, two of every three households had one. Twice as many people owned radios as owned telephones.

J. Fred MacDonald: Radio was, in the life of Americans in general, radio developed into a phenomenal adhesive.

Historian J. Fred MacDonald.

MacDonald: It created a common culture. You could say that magazines and even the motion picture industry created a common culture, but they were experienced all at different times. But radio was experienced simultaneously by the nation. Broadcasts from New York could be heard in Los Angeles and vice versa. The country was tied together as it had never been tied before.

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In the years before World War II, numerous programs were sponsored by the federal government to provide unifying messages about citizenship and cooperation. By the end of the 1930s, Washington had good reason to encourage citizens to behave like ethnic groups second, and Americans first.

[Hitler speech in German]

Winston Churchill: Side by side, the British and French peoples have advanced to rescue not only Europe, but mankind.

As fascism boiled across Europe in the late 1930s, many Americans feared the tide would reach them. And the country was vulnerable. The Great Depression had devastated the national economy. Violent labor strikes, ethnic tensions and the threat of communism all churned American society. Hard times drew some Americans to a homegrown kind of fascism, especially groups that championed supposedly Christian, Caucasian values. In 1939 a pro-Nazi rally drew 20,000 people to New York's Madison Square Garden.

Speaker: These United States also, are the product of a particular group, the Aryan group. The men and women who conquered and pioneered this continent and built upon it.

On the radio, meanwhile, one of the most popular personalities was a red-baiting, Jew-hating priest named Charles Coughlin.

Charles Coughlin: I ask you, if you will rise in your places and fight with me to restore America to the Americans. *[Applause]*

But Coughlin's following was nothing compared to the loyal fans of a more casual, everyday sort of prejudice on the radio. From the late 1920s until well into World War II, the most popular program on the air was a daily parody of black people.

Amos: Andy, listen, the man is just about to say it!

Andy: Yeah, let's everybody listen!

Announcer: Rinso, the new Rinso with Solium, brings you the Amos and Andy Show!

[Amos 'N' Andy theme song]

Six days a week, a pair of white actors played Amos and Andy, a pair of black bumpkins. Forty million people listened.

Andy: It was a good job too. I was night watchman on a building the government was putting up. They fired me, I don't know why.

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Amos: Well, wasn't you a good night watchman?

Andy: Certainly I was. Course there was a little something missing one morning, but didn't bother much.

Amos: What was it that was missing Andy?

Andy: The steam shovel.

Vernon Jarrett: Well, my name is Vernon Jarrett.

Andy: I still can't figure out how the thieves done stole that thing. I was right on the job there as usual, sleeping less than ten feet away from the thing. *[laughter]*

Jarrett: Some of the stuff was genuinely funny. *[laughs]* But you had to resent it because that's all they had us doing. You get what I mean? Because, in the white media we didn't exist except as comedians. We weren't born, we didn't get married, we didn't have children, we didn't get college degrees and we didn't die.

Andy: I know I didn't propose to her neither. She's the big fat one with all the double chins.

Amos: Ooh yeah yeah, I remember seeing you with that one once. She gots a lots of double chins alright.

Andy: Oh yeah, I never knowed which was her chins and which was her lips. I never knowed where to kiss her.

Amos: You didn't huh?

Andy: No, I finally worked out a system though.

Amos: What system was that Andy?

Andy: I'd hold a piece of candy up to her face and whatever opened up to it, that's what I kissed. *[laughter]*

Historian Jim Horton says the popularity of Amos 'N' Andy helped make radio the first truly mass medium, one that could reach a majority of the nation instantly, and could change or reinforce public opinion.

Horton: And so Amos 'N' Andy, in some ways, became a kind of confirmation in the minds of many whites that the segregation system was basically OK. That the racist thoughts you had were OK because they were based in reality.

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Radio executives took little note of African Americans. In the early days, many blacks couldn't afford radios, or many of the products radio advertised. Historian J. Fred Macdonald.

MacDonald: Blacks were not a part, not a very prominent part, of American radio. Radio was a Caucasian medium. It was very quickly, by the government, given over to private enterprise. The idea then became to make money.

Even if a black broadcaster could draw listeners, that didn't always matter. Radio legend Hal Jackson got his start announcing baseball games for the Negro leagues. One day he took an idea for a radio show to a station in Washington DC.

Hal Jackson: And this General Manager said to me "Oh, would you wait here?" And he went and got his whole staff and he said, "Let me tell you all something. You know this nigger is talking about going on this radio station. Is that allowed? No nigger will ever go on this radio station."

In years leading up to World War II, segregation and racism were more common than not in America. The repressive system of laws and customs was called Jim Crow after a 19th century minstrel character. In the north, Jim Crow was a custom, blacks were simply unwelcome in many public places. In the South, Jim Crow was both custom and law. In many southern towns, showing disrespect to white folks was enough to get a black man or woman or child arrested.

Ann Pointer: And you knew your place, you know what I'm saying? And your parents would tell you, now, when you go to town, make sure, they would tell you exactly where to walk.

Ann Pointer grew up on a farm near Tuskegee, Alabama.

Pointer: If you were meetin' a couple comin' down the street and they were white, you had step down into the gutter. And Tuskegee wasn't always paved. It was red mud, and I don't care if there was a storm and you step down in the gutter, you couldn't meet a man and his wife. They wouldn't move and if you faced them up like that, you'd go to jail.

America was so segregated that even the blood supplies were separate. And in some states, the local courts kept two different bibles: one to swear in whites, the other for blacks.

Pointer: They had a theatre downtown called the Rose Theatre. And I was very small child, but we sat upstairs and the whites sat downstairs. But you had to be very quiet. If you did anything at all they'd throw you out. My father would say, "Look, don't try to use the restroom or anything, just go in here and sit down," because they would pitch you out.

Eunice Adair Tingling: My Name is Eunice Adair Tingling. I can remember the black and white water fountains in the stores. The black fountain and the white fountain. And it wasn't called black at that time. It was called the colored fountain and the white. Sometimes we would

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slip in and turn on the white water to see if it was a different, with a different color or what have you and it never was. And of course our parents always got us out of there.

Dorothy Washington: My name is Dorothy Washington. My mother did work downtown. Mrs. Snyder's Candy. All she could do was wash the pots and pans in Mrs. Snyder's candy factory. That's all blacks were allowed to do, black women. The white women were able to dip chocolate and swirl and all of that. But all she could do was wash pans.

Thelma Davidson Adair: I am Thelma Davidson Adair, a retired university professor. This was a period of perhaps the greatest number of lynchings. Everything was separate. Total restrictions. And at every moment you could be humiliated just because of color.

Amelia Robinson of Tuskegee remembers a time in the 30s when she came upon a highway accident. Four white college students were horribly injured and no one had come along yet to help.

Robinson: And just a few, a couple of blocks from there, there was a black funeral home. And going up on this first, I immediately went to the black funeral home to tell them what had happened. Of course, by then, people were gathering. And I told them to send an ambulance to take these people to a hospital. The black funeral home sent the ambulance. I talked about 15 minutes with the funeral director. Then I drove back on down. And two of these people were still there waiting for a white ambulance because they didn't want a black ambulance to pick up white people. They'd rather die in those days.

Jim Crow's tenacious grip on America troubled some members of the Roosevelt administration. They feared that restrictions on blacks and intolerance against ethnic groups could lead to domestic unrest, just when the escalating Nazi threat called for national unity. So FDR's Office of Education grasped the most powerful instrument of the day for shaping American opinion: the radio microphone.

Singing Voices: Remember the immigrant all!

Announcer: Today we bring you the story of one immigrant who did not come of his own free will, the Negro. Brought here as slaves for nearly 200 years, emancipated only 75 years ago, the Negroes were and are a challenge to democracy, and an important part of our economic and social development.

"Americans All, Immigrants All" aired in 1938 and 39 on CBS. It was written by the journalist and critic Gilbert Seldes. Two eminent black scholars acted as advisers to the series, Alaine Locke and W.E.B. DuBois. Negro activists, as they were called then, hoped the government-sponsored show would portray African Americans as a sophisticated people ready to contribute to modern society. Some were disappointed by how much the program focused on familiar images of blacks.

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Martha: *[weeping]* Alabama! They're going to take you to Alabama!

Jim: They sold me, Martha - and they wouldn't sell you.

Martha: Oh Jim, Jim, they can't take you away.

Jim: Seems they kin, Martha.

MacDonald: You have to realize it's a first step. So it's not going to be as bold as a lot of people might have wanted. On the other hand, it's really bold when you look at what a lot of people didn't want.

Historian J. Fred MacDonald.

MacDonald: Being a federal government initiative, you couldn't go too far because Southern politicians, Southern listeners, Southern stations wouldn't carry it. Remember, the Democratic base by 1939 depended greatly on the white Southern voter. They were strongly supportive of Franklin Roosevelt, and you didn't want to alienate that.

Nevertheless, black writers and activists kept pressuring the Roosevelt administration to speak openly and forcefully for civil rights. They had limited success.

Amos: You're listening to a special report from American RadioWorks, Radio Fights Jim Crow. After a short break, America goes to war. But will black citizens join the fight?

Man: Why are you here, fighting us, when you don't have any rights in your own country?

Amos:I'm Deborah Amos, this special report from American RadioWorks will continue in just a moment, here on NPR, National Public Radio.

Part Two

Announcer: Senators and Representatives, I have the distinguished honor of presenting the President of the United States. *[loud cheers]*

Amos: From American RadioWorks, this is a special report, Radio Fights Jim Crow. I'm Deborah Amos.

Franklin Roosevelt: No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people in their righteous might will win through to absolute victory. *[Applause]*

Amos: On December 8, 1941, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt declared war on Japan. America would need all its strength to fight in both Asia and Europe, and Roosevelt's

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administration feared that racial turmoil at home would hinder the war effort. Correspondent Stephen Smith explains that the federal government turned once again to the powerful medium of radio.

Actor: Yes, freedom, there's a word. My mother held me on her knee and said "Honey, some day you're gonna be free," and she was right. So now I sing.

Smith: It was Sunday afternoon, September 21st, 1941.

Announcer: From the old world they came. High with hopes and strong. To America they brought this hope and strength, and founded a nation of splendid freedoms. But this is not their story. No, this is the story of those who did not come but were taken. The story of those who lost freedom when they came upon our shores. And for years they tilled our soil, gathered our crops, and made the land good. Some won liberty. Others waited. Then freedom came to all, a liberty well deserved, a liberty triumphant. Yes, this is the story of the American Negro, 13 million citizens of the United States. And now the National Broadcasting Company in cooperation with the United States Office of Education in the Federal Security Agency brings you this program dedicated to and conceived by the American Negro, truly Freedom's People!

Barbara Savage: Freedom's people was really an attempt by one man, Ambrose Caliver, who was an African American civil servant in the Office of Education, to get a show on the air that was dedicated solely to the project of African American history, to Negro history, as it was called at the time.

Historian Barbara Savage.

Savage: That it was able to be as successful and to be on the air as long as it was over the course of these six to eight months is in fact a credit to the war. All of those concerns about racial unity reinforced the necessity and the importance of the show, and I think that prolonged its life and certainly also drove up its listenership.

Freedom's People reached millions of Americans, and study guides about African American history were printed for school and community groups to use. The show tried to humanize blacks in the eyes of their fellow Americans by cataloging black accomplishments and qualities. Often as not, the program attacked one stereotype while reinforcing another.

Voices: *[singing]* I'm gonna sing, I'm gonna sing, I'm gonna sing all along the way! I'm gonna sing!

Narrator: Sure! You're going to sing. All day long working in the fields. All night long you're gonna sing. You're going to sing. Know why?

Voice: Why?

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Narrator: Because singing is a door you can slam in the face of trouble. Because singing is going home. Because singing is any man's right. And you can sing.

2nd Voice: You bet we can mister. We can sing fine.

The first Freedom's People celebrated the least controversial aspect of African American life: music. Early Sunday afternoon was radio's prime time, and to draw a large audience for the first show, Ambrose Caliver persuaded some of the biggest names in black music to appear, including W.C. Handy and Paul Robeson.

Paul Robeson: *[singing]* No more auction block for me, no more, no more, no more, many thousand gone.

Robeson: No More, sung at the end of the Civil War, becomes today a song of protest, demanding that the promise of the Emancipation Proclamation be fully realized.

That kind of oblique criticism was about as tough as Freedom's People ever got. The government wanted its programs on race to persuade, not push, celebrate, not scold. One Freedom's People show explained how black workers had contributed to America's prosperity, from 18th century slavery to 20th century shipyards, from Civil War to world war.

Announcer: Yes, he was speaking in 1918. But he could be speaking today. For the Negro worker is again building for democracy. Again, when given the chance, going all out on the construction front. In answer to the president's plea of June 25th reaffirming the policy of full participation in the defense program of all persons, regardless of race, creed, color or national origin, American industry is employing more Negroes today than ever before.

In spite of such optimistic words, the war was also amplifying racial inequalities in America. Historian J. Fred MacDonald.

MacDonald: Blacks were being brought into the workplace in big numbers. They needed African American hands and backs and minds to run the factories that turn out the tanks. So there's a wave of immigration into Detroit, where the big automobile plants have now been turned into war material plants. The needed African Americans in the steel plants. So they're moving into the big cities more than they have ever moved into the big cities. And they're rubbing against whites who either have lived there or recently migrated from the South themselves. So there's pure race hatred moving right into a town near you.

Racial tensions exploded several times during World War II, in New York, Los Angeles, Houston, and another cities.

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Announcer: Dear fellow Americans, what you are about to hear may anger you. What you are about to hear may sound incredible to you. You may doubt such things can happen today in this supposedly united nation. But we assure you, everything you are about to hear is true.

In July 1943, a brawl in Detroit between whites and burst into a white rampage through the city's black neighborhoods. Thirty-four people died, hundreds were injured, most of them black.

Announcer: This danger is race hatred.

Leaders of national black organizations asked CBS to air some sort of program that might ease racial tensions in Detroit and across America. With no involvement from the government, CBS produced an unusually blunt program: "An Open Letter on Race Hatred."

Announcer: Because we believe that no sensible, fully informed American, will allow to happen, here at home, what he is fighting against all over the world.

The program reconstructed the Detroit riot step by step. The writers hoped that if Americans could understand what caused this riot, future ones might be prevented.

Announcer: In the crowded flats and overflowing houses along Tireman and Efworth Boulevard in the negro district, the heat pressed down like the sweaty hand of John Henry.

[blowing car horn]

Woman: Eddie, you're not going to get us home any faster by blowing the horn!

Eddie: If that guy ahead would just move forward I can get into the other line! Shut up! There, now I can brake.

Woman: Be careful!

[Sound of cars squealing]

Eddie Did you see that? He pulled out right in front of me! Hey you stupid jerk!

Man: What's the big idea bud?

Eddie: Oh, a negro! Listen you, get out of that car and I'll show you!

2nd Man: What's going on?

3rd Man: A couple of guys fighting. The black guy's quite a baby with his fists.

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4th Man: A fight about a baby on the Bell Isle Bridge!

Woman: A baby fell over Bell Isle Bridge!

Announcer: There was another rumor: the white version.

Man: What's the trouble?

2nd Man: I don't know, tangled bumpers I guess. That's the white guy's gal sittin' in the car.

3rd Man: They're fightin' over a white girl on the Bell Isle Bridge!

The Open Letter also dramatized the social changes aggravating racial intolerance. The focus was Detroit, but it could have been most almost any wartime city in America.

Man: Hey boy!

Negro: Yass suh.

Man: Want a good job?

Negro: I sure do. What do I have to do for it?

Man: Nothing, just come to Detroit.

Negro: Detroit?

Man: Sure, work in the war plants making tanks and guns.

Negro: Sure nuff?

Man: On the level.

Announcer: In three years Detroit has imported 500,000 Negroes and whites, mostly from the South.

Man: That's right, as many people as live in New Orleans or the state of Arizona. It's a big operation.

Announcer: It certainly is. But Detroit doesn't have houses for a half million extra people. Detroit doesn't have enough streetcars and buses to move the state of Arizona back and forth from work. Detroit doesn't have enough parks or movies. A burst of organizers of native Nazi orators took their soapboxes outside a dozen war plants.

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Nazi Orator: I'd rather see Hitler and Hirohito win then work beside a Negro on an assembly line!

Announcer: Detroit was dynamite! We've got too tough an enemy to beat overseas, to fight each other here at home. Sincerely yours, the Columbia Broadcasting System.

The Open Letter caused a national sensation. Time magazine called it one of the most eloquent and outspoken programs in radio history. Several Southern affiliates refused to air the program, viewing it as too sympathetic to blacks. And station officials in Detroit complained afterwards to CBS that the program gave too much credence to African American accounts of the riot. While bigotry afflicted the home front, there was plenty of friction on the war front too.

As blacks lined up for military service, Jim Crow met them at the door. With few exceptions, the US military was strictly segregated, and blacks filled low-ranking support jobs as cooks, drivers and the like.

Josh White: *[singing]* Well, airplanes flying across the land and sea. Everybody's flying but a Negro like me. Uncle Sam says your place is on the ground. When I fly my airplane, don't want no Negro 'round.

Bob Washington: I'm Bob Washington. And it was painful as I watched in Europe, black soldiers carrying out their duties, as I did mine, and realizing that I was in a segregated army. We had our own mess hall, our own service club, the service club for black men and the service club for white men. Everything was segregated, even though we were in Germany and all other kinds of places.

Azalia Oliver: I'm Azalia Oliver, Cleveland Ohio. I was a PFC in the Army. We lived in barracks, which were on stilts and they were heated by pot bellied stoves. While the white soldiers lived in gas heated barracks. Even the German POWs lived in gas heated barracks.

James Horton: Listen, in the Second World War, my father was a member of the military police. His job was to guard German prisoners, and to transport them from one place in the United States to another part of the United States. Do you realize that on some of those journeys, he was forced to stand at the entry way to the dining car because African Americans were not allowed to sit in the dining car? But while the German prisoners sat in the car and ate.

Josh White: *[singing]* The same thing in the navy, when ships go to sea, all they got is a mess boy's job for me. Uncle Sam says, keep on your apron son. No I ain't gonna let you, shoot my big Navy gun.

As America charged into battle, Japan and Germany tried to weaken allied morale through propaganda, especially on the radio. English speaking announcers such as Germany's Axis Sally

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and Japan's disc jockey known as Tokyo Rose, tried to corrode the will of Allied troops by preying on the soldier's homesickness or his uncertainties about the war.

Woman's Voice: Hello boys, American boys, I've got your favorite jazz recordings. Remember this Glen Miller? "You'd Be So Nice To Come Home To"? Who are you thinking of boys?

Bob Washington served in the Army in both Europe and the Pacific. He remembers hearing special German radio messages aimed directly at black soldiers.

Washington: Why are you here fighting us when you don't have any rights in your own country? I heard that on several occasions. And I also felt it on several occasions. Here I am in a segregated army, we had a company of black men and our officers were white except on one on two or three occasions, fighting to defend America that I'm coming back to, knowing that once I get back here, things are not going to be much better. It was painful.

Black citizens and soldiers were bitterly aware how paradoxical their position was in World Ward II, says historian James Horton.

Horton: Don't forget that the same theory that Hitler tried to justify killing six million Jews, that was the same scientific racist theory that had justified, so I should say, Southern segregationists had used, in an attempt to justify Jim Crow legislation in American Society.

Retired university professor Thelma Adair.

Adair: Despite the denial, despite the tragedy, despite the suffering, black folks, colored folks, Negro, Afro-Americans, claim America. This was your country, and so the loyalty, and this is the mystery of it all, was so strong, that you never, even as we worked in war plants, even as we brought our crippled back, even as we buried our dead and got flags - we were not fighting for someone else. We too were America, and we only wanted the chance and the opportunity that we could have to sit at the table.

Black patriotism and valor in battle were constant themes on the radio programs. African American families were portrayed grieving for the sons they lost in war, just like white families.

Announcer: Out on a red dusty farm near Sadieville, Kentucky, an old Negro couple trim their fields.

Negro Woman: Pa, do you think it hurt him? Did he suffer Pa?

Pa: No no, let's pray to God it didn't.

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Negro Woman: Robert would be coming in for his afternoon sandwich just about now. He'd be a-comin' in all sweatied up and laughing. I'd tell him to wash up first. He'd hug me tight and blow in my ear. He knew I liked that sorta thing.

Pa: Better get started on this next row.

Negro Woman: And then he left! Remember Pa? He did just that, took me in his arms and laughing, blew into my ears. I had a feeling then, Pa. It's true I had the strangest feeling.

Pa: The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away.

Negro Woman: Amen!

Though most blacks were denied the chance to fight in combat, Freedom's People celebrated a real-life hero named Doris Miller.

[sound of gun fire]

Commander: Get down Miller! For the Lord's sake get down! Why aren't you below?

Miller: Can't do no fighting there.

Commander: You're not supposed to be on the bridge!

Miller: No sir!

Commander: Then I'm ordering you down now! Go below!

[sound of gun fire]

Commander: Oh! I'm hit!

Miller: Here, here let me help you!

Commander: *[moans]*

Miller: Bad sir?

Commander: I don't -

Miller: There you are!

Commander: Where - where are you going?

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Miller: Back to the bridge!

Commander: You'll be killed!

Miller: There's a machine gun there, and I'm aiming to get a little killin' in first!

Commander: Come back!

[Sound of gun fire]

Miller: That's for the Captain! That's for me!

Doris Miller was awarded the Navy Cross for his bravery. He died a year later when his ship was torpedoed.

Amos: While Washington cranked up its propaganda machine to rally American morale, black artists and activists created radio shows of their own, programs that hit hard at American hypocrisy.

Man 1: Didn't we help build this country?

Man 2: But is you sharing in it, after knocking yo'self out every day, tell me that?

Man 3: If you ask me I say, this is a white man's war. Let the white folks kill each other.

Amos: This is Deborah Amos. Major funding for American RadioWorks comes from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Radio Fights Jim Crow is supported, in part, by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. To hear some of the original radio programs, see photographs from the war era and learn more about segregation in America, visit our website at American RadioWorks-dot-org. That's all one word, American RadioWorks-dot org. You're listening to Radio Fights Jim Crow, a special report from American RadioWorks on NPR, National Public Radio.

Part Three

Dwight Eisenhower: A landing was made this morning on the coast of France by troops of the Allied Expeditionary Force. This landing is part of a concerted United Nations plan for the liberation of Europe.

Amos: You're listening to a special report from American RadioWorks, Radio Fights Jim Crow. I'm Deborah Amos. General Dwight D. Eisenhower announced the D-Day invasion of France on June 6, 1944. The American war machine was running full throttle both abroad and at home. All manner of patriotic messages spilled out of the radio.

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Announcer: America's Fighting Men Need Meat! The best meat! Plenty of it!

Man: That's why we civilians are holding our consumption to two and half pounds weekly.

Housewife: As a housewife, I find I can still prepare delicious, nourishing meals.

Amos: In this final part of our special report, Stephen Smith explains that most of America's home-front propaganda featured up-beat, flag-waving themes. But there were a few vigorous exceptions.

Smith: The handful of government-sponsored radio programs that talked about racial inequality were pretty mild in tone. Fearful of offending Southern listeners and radio stations, the scripts edged up on issues like racism and segregation without directly facing them. The rule was, stay positive. Show the best about blacks, not the worst about whites.

Announcer: One hundred thousand Negroes are today helping to fight our battle. In every branch of the armed service you will find them. Soldiers of freedom, battling desperately for the perpetuation, the preservation, the everlasting glory of the land that they love so well.

Horton: African Americans during the Second World War were fighting for the double V: the double victory.

Historian James Horton.

Horton: Victory at home against the kind of racial restrictions that African Americans faced, even as they were fighting for victory abroad, against the kind of enemies that Japan and Germany, Italy presented.

In New York City, Thelma Adair remembers that almost every black family in her Harlem neighborhood was somehow touched by the war. Men went off to fight, pastors organized their congregations for war relief projects, and lots of people worked in defense factories.

Adair: My husband was at the church during the day and we had a young baby. But I worked in a war plant at night. From 12 to 8. That was the appropriate thing to do. I was inspecting radar tubes. And you could not be more loyal.

Loyal, yes. But increasingly impatient for change.

Adair: This constant paradox of being the trusted loyal one, but also at the same time, in the same breath, being denied, was paramount. And I think it was very confusing for many of us.

One Sunday afternoon in March of 1944, an entirely different kind of radio program took the air.

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Announcer: With the sweep and fury of the resurrection, there's a new world a coming.

Broadcast in New York, the program was created by prominent African American writer and journalist Roi Ottley. Duke Ellington wrote the theme music. New World a Coming aimed directly at the paradox of black life in Jim Crow America.

Announcer: Faced today with fascism or democracy, the Negro's choice is simple. He's against fascism, both at home and abroad. When right thinking elements appease fascist thinking, the Negro's morale is jolted. For he knows well there are those who would rather lose the war, even their own freedom, than see democracy triumph.

New World a Coming aired on the liberal New York station WMCA. It presented graphic vignettes about Jim Crow America, down South and up North. New World a Coming often focused on the war, and offered an unusually candid view of African American ambivalence towards military service.

Announcer: Two men stood before a bar in a tavern.

Biggie: Yes, Stump, that's alright, but I don't see why the government's doing nothing to help the lives of us folks.

Stump: We beginning to get jobs since the war, ain't we Biggie?

Biggie: Well if you ask me, I'm beginning to think that the white folks are gonna be tough, long as you stay black. Just last week a Negro Army Nurse was gettin' on a bus in Alabama, and a white driver took his fists and beat her.

Stump: What?

Biggie: Yeah, and just because she wouldn't get up and give her seat up for somebody. Southern chivalry, they call it. Well, I ask you, is that any way to treat people? Make you feel like you was living with them Nazis.

Tom Elkins: Hello Daddy, don't mind me comin' over this way. My name's Tom Elkins.

Stump: I'm Hickenbottom, they call me Stump for short. This is Biggie.

Biggie: What you sayin' there?

Elkins: I ain't nowhere. Just heard what you was layin' down, and them's my sentiments. Always say white folks be white folks.

Stump: Didn't we help build this country?

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Biggie: But is you sharin' in it? After knocking yourself out everyday? Tell me that?

Elkins: If you ask me I says this is the white man's war. Let the white folk kill eachother. It ain't our mess.

Stump: Yeah, but Negroes is getting' killed too. Buying war bonds and workin' in factories and all that.

Elkins: Yeah, but do it make sense?

Biggie: You gonna fight for the white folks Stump? Man, you always talk like a traitor.

Historian Barbara Savage says that unlike the programs sponsored by Washington, New World A Comin' programs could afford to be outspoken.

Savage: They were aimed at a Northern urban black audience, at a Northern urban liberal audience, and not a great deal of concerned about this imagined Southern listener, and certainly not concerned about Southern white congressmen either, and these being restrictions I think that the Federal programs and national programming had to contend with all the time.

Announcer: But one day he went before the Registration Board in an Alabama town. He was anxious to vote in the next election.

Election Judge: Well, I think before we register y'all, we just oughta see if y'all can read. Very well. Well, now, let's just see what y'all can do with this.

Man: Why, that's French newspaper.

Election Judge: Eh, reckon it is. Wouldn't be a bit surprised. What's it say?

Man: "Paris has been buzzing since September 11th." Is that satisfactory sir?

Election Judge: I guess so, I guess so. I'd like to hear you all read this one.

Man: German, certainly. "As it should be the German Army is supreme in surmounting all obstacles." Anything else sir?

Election Judge: I think there is. Just one more, and we'll be through. Read me a line or two from here. Anything will do. Here you are.

Man: Chinese?

Election Judge: What's it say?

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Man: It says, it says that in Alabama they don't let Negroes vote.

When the war ended in September 1945, black servicemen were unsure what to expect once their troop ships landed back home. Would Jim Crow meet them at the docks? Dorothy Height, long-time leader of the National Council of Negro Women, says black soldiers knew coming home might be difficult.

Height: I remember one little ditty a fellow wrote, that said "I'm dreaming of a white Christmas, will I come home to a job or to a tree, will they lynch me in Tennessee; when the lights go on all over the world, will those lights shine on me?"

Historian Barbara Savage says blacks had sacrificed too much in the war to settle peacefully back into Jim Crow America.

Savage: Hundreds of thousands of African American men were returning to this country having served honorably and having witnessed the deaths of some of their comrades, and to return to a nation where, I know in my experience that my father, who was a World War II Vet, tells me the humiliation of not being able to get a cup of coffee at a Greyhound station on his way home after coming back from France after the war. And so you multiply that sense of humiliation, and at some point patience runs out.

In 1945, a black official at the war department began talking with CBS about producing a program on the problems facing returning African American soldiers. Nearly a million of them were coming home. An Army corporal drafted a provocative script called, "The Glass." It's the story of Sam and Ted, two recently returned war buddies, one black and one white. Here's the title scene - recreated - from the original script.

Sam: You wanna sit down?

Ted: The bar's good enough.

Sam: Hey, man.

Bartender: Hold your horses bub!

Sam: Gotta catch a bus!

Bartender: I'll get there!

Ted: This one's on me.

Sam: No!

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Ted: I'll pay for this one. Once you get your job, buy me a double bourbon.

Sam: Thanks Ted. What are you drinking?

Ted: Rye.

Sam: Hey man, could we please have -

Bartender: What do you want?

Sam: Two Ryes, one with water.

Bartender: No Rye.

Sam: What?

Bartender: No Rye.

Sam: What are in those bottles?

Bartender: Those are for display.

Ted: Sam, let's go!

Sam: Wait a minute…

Bartender: Your pal's got the idea.

Sam: Alright, give us two beers.

Bartender: My tab's busted.

Sam: Since when? Two beers! You heard me.

[Pouring drinks]

Bartender: 20 cents.

Sam: Keep the change.

Ted: Sam, forget it, we got the beers.

[Gulping noises]

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Ted: What you gulp it down like that for?

Sam: The bus is gonna pull out Ted.

Ted: That bus'll be there five minutes Sam.

Bartender: Here's the change.

Sam: I said keep it.

Bartender: We don't take tips here. You finished with the glass?

Ted: Me?

Bartender: You finished?

Ted: Yeah, thanks.

Bartender: Let me have it. *[Smashes glass]*

Sam: Why you!

Bartender: You think my customers would drink out of a glass that a n-

Sam: Hey, shut up.

Ted: Sam, stop.

Sam: How can you just stand there and take this?

Ted: Let's go, let's just go. We're back home, Sam.

The Glass was too controversial back home. The Army dropped the script. CBS never aired the show. Three years later, a post-war radio program came along that spoke with an especially impatient voice about racism and civil rights.

Announcer: Destination Freedom. The Chicago Defender and station WMAQ bring you Destination Freedom, a special radio series dramatizing the great Democratic traditions of the Negro people, interwoven in the pageant of history, and the part of America's own, Destination Freedom.

The man behind Desination Freedom was Richard Durham, a young journalist and radio writer with extraordinary determination. Over the next two years, Durham produced 90 programs on

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African American life, past and present. In a remarkable program of June 1949, Destination Freedom told the story of a prominent black city council man of the time from the viewpoint of his greatest adversary. The narrator wasn't a person, but a problem that confronted many returning black veterans.

Narrator: Morning, how do you do? I'm happy and I'm healthy I hope. Jammed six families in a rundown flat. Dark stairways, roof coming down, streets dirty, rent sky high. Sickness all around you. Segregated in my area I hope? Me? My name is slums, you've seen me around. Slums are the cemeteries of the living, he says. Jim Crow is the undertaker, he says. He's the one I wanna tell you about, this AME Reverend, this Windy City Alderman, he says I gotta go. Stick around. Let me give you the lowdown on a guy who's trying to run slums out of town.

Richard Durham wrote Destination Freedom for two years. It was a remarkably powerful and innovative program, and nothing quite like it would follow, anywhere in the United States. Oddly enough, this program dedicated to defeating racism originated from the same Chicago studio used by Amos 'N' Andy.

At the end of the 1940s, as the cold war and the anti-communist crusades began smothering American politics like a chilling fog, broadcasters grew fearful of supporting programs that seemed too radical. And civil rights were radical. The programs stopped. As America entered a new decade, the 1950s, a new world had not come. Freedom's People were still far from Destination Freedom.

Savage: I think that the greatest lingering impact from these shows is that many of the people who were involved in producing them, many people who were involved in the struggles of the 1940s, do in turn go on to be involved in civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

Historian Barbara Savage.

Savage: I think that very specific and strong lessons were learned during the production of these radio shows. Both about the importance of mass media, but also I think about the centrality of mass media to the struggle for racial equality in this country. And a recognition that radio, and then television of course, which was the medium of the civil rights movement, would and could play a really central role. That media, race & politics are intertwined.

Historian Jim Horton says the era of the 1940s, when black Americans were fighting for the double V, victory against fascism and victory against Jim Crow, made the modern civil rights movement possible.

Horton: After that era you get the beginning of a different America. It didn't happen all at once, it was a slow process, but you see the beginnings of a different America. Harry Truman integrates the Armed Forces. It seems like a little thing now but it was a big thing then, and that

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is, Jackie Robinson becomes the first black Major League Baseball player in modern times. It was a big deal then. What you're starting to see is a few cracks in the wall of racial segregation.

In the 1940s, radio waves helped produce some of the fractures that civil rights activists would hammer at for the next 50 years, trying pull down the walls of prejudice.

Amos: Radio Fights Jim Crow was written, produced and narrated by Stephen Smith. It was edited by Deborah George. Coordinating producers: Sasha Aslanian and Stephanie Curtis. With help from Tina Tennessen, Ahndi Fridell, Melissa Mendelson. The executive producer is Bill Buzenberg. I'm Deborah Amos.

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