

# Here is Our Chance



## Here is Our Chance

### Introduction

Executive Order 8802 creating the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) was signed by President Franklin Roosevelt on June 25, 1941. The executive order that stated "there shall be no discrimination in the employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed color, or national origin." It banned discrimination in the war industries plants and set up a commission to investigate complaints.

By the wars end, African-Americans civilians accounted for 8% of the work force in the defense industry. With the death of FDR in April 1945 and the end of the war in August 1945, the FEPC was not extended and legislation to make it permanent died in Congress by 1946. Beginning in 1945, eight states, including Rhode Island (1949) approved Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) laws prohibiting discrimination in employment. This legislation did not become national law until the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

### Standards

#### **RI K-12 GSEs for Civics & Government and Historical Perspectives/RI History**

#### **High School Proficiency Grades 9-12**

#### **HP 1: History is an account of human activities that is interpretive in nature.**

##### **HP 1–1 Students *act as historians*, using a variety of tools (e.g., artifacts and primary and secondary sources) by...**

- a. formulating historical questions, obtaining, analyzing, evaluating historical primary and secondary print and non-print sources
- b. explaining how historical facts and historical interpretations may be different, but are related
- c. identifying, describing, or analyzing multiple perspectives on an historical trend or event

##### **HP 1–2: Students interpret history as a series of connected events with multiple cause-effect relationships, by**

- a. explaining cause and effect relationships in order to sequence and summarize events, make connections between a series of events, or compare/contrast events
- b. interpreting and constructing visual data (e.g., timelines, charts, graphs, flowchart, historical films, political cartoons) in order to explain historical continuity and change
- c.

##### **HP 2: History is a chronicle of human activities, diverse people, and the societies they form**

##### **HP 2– 1: Students connect the past with the present by**

- a. explaining origins of major historical events
- b. identifying and linking key ideas and concepts and their enduring implications
- c. analyzing and evaluating how national and world events have impacted Rhode Island and how Rhode Island has impacted national and world events

##### **HP 2 – 2: Students chronicle events and conditions by...**

- a. creating narratives based on a particular historical point of view
- b. synthesizing information from multiple sources to formulate an historical interpretation

##### **HP 2– 3: Students show understanding of change over time by...**

- a. tracing patterns chronologically in history to describe changes on domestic, social, or economic life
- b. documenting various groups and their traditions that have remained constant over time

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### Document # 1

#### POST WAR PLANS MUST BE MADE NOW

On Monday a Mass Meeting is being held in the Rhode Island School of Design Auditorium to exemplify the desire of the people of this state for "Victory in War—Unity in Peace"—a mass meeting being sponsored by a large committee of citizens, including Negroes, from all walks of life. The meeting has the blessing of a proclamation by the Governor of Rhode Island, and points to the pressing need for careful post-war planning now. This need is everywhere recognized, and committees for this purpose are being formed in Providence and in other communities.

Colored people have a particular interest in whatever plans are made for the after-the-war period, and should take a very active part in the deliberations now to start.

First, we should have articulate representation on Post-War Planning groups—Negroes who are close to the people, and who are cognizant of the needs and desires of the group; liberal white friends who will be alert to see that minority groups are included in the plans and projects.

Then we need planning groups of our own, groups which could and should formulate a program for the Negro as a part of the Post-War community. The Negro needs to deal realistically with his problems and their solution; needs to be in a position to admit his own shortcomings, to evaluate the contribution he can make to the community, and to assume his responsibilities. All-colored groups, where discussions can be openly frank could work with definite ends in view. These should in no way replace the general and mixed committees, but should be adjunct to them.

Come the end of the war—and the end may come, please God, sooner than many expect,—the general employment at high wages will end. In any wave of unemployment colored people are certain to be hard hit. There are all too many people now, with defense jobs at war pay, who believe the war will last ten years or longer, and who are actually so hoping. And because they believe their period of prosperity will last a long time, little or nothing is being saved. One function of a Post-War Planning Committee might well be to encourage thrift and savings now, and to arouse people to the fact that present boom conditions will not always exist.

Post-War planning by colored groups should take in a very broad scope—jobs after the war, and the attitude and habits of colored workers in industrial plants NOW; their public conduct; legislation; labor unionism, etc. Churches and religious leaders should be planning, also; every community group should be thinking about its program after the war. Plans must be made to assure colored men returning from the armed services their rightful place in the economic and social life of the community. And in thinking about our own group and problems, we should consider also the general plans which are being made, and look upon them from the community as well as the group perspective.

Individuals, too should be giving serious thought to the future, and not leave all the planning to others, and to committees. The purchase of War Bonds now, saving for the lean days ahead; learning everything possible about the job one is doing; taking all other specialized training possible; getting into jobs which offer security for the future, instead of being blinded by the glitter of a big money job which may only last "for the duration."

## **Here is Our Chance**

### Document Analysis Worksheet

Type of Document:	Date:
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1. Who was the audience for this document? Cite examples from the article in your answer.
2. What was the purpose of the meeting?
3. Why is there a need for a plan?
4. Write 1-2 paragraphs about war time employment for African Americans in Rhode Island and how people thought things would change after the war. Explain the plan of action proposed by the organizers of this meeting. Use specific examples from the document



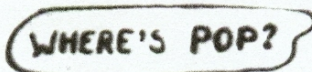
# Here is Our Chance

Document #2

## IT HAPPENED IN PROVIDENCE IN 1946



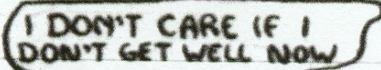
THE TELEPHONE COMPANY HIRED COLORED GIRLS FOR THE FIRST TIME



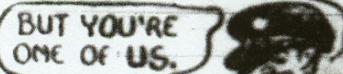
THE AMERICAN MOTHER OF 1946 CAME FROM PROV. MRS. EMMA C. CLEMENT



A SQUARE WAS NAMED IN HONOR OF ED WILLIAM ARMSTRONG



THE R.I. HOSPITAL TOOK OUR GIRLS AS NURSES



PROVIDENCE GOT ITS FIRST NEGRO PATROLMAN IN ALFRED LIMA

by  
Charley Bentley

## Here is Our Chance

### Cartoon Analysis Worksheet

List the objects or people you see in the cartoon:	Identify the cartoon caption and/or title:
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6. What is the date of the cartoon and why is it important?	
7. Explain the message of the cartoon. Cite examples from the cartoon.	



## Here is Our Chance

Document #3

**HERE IS OUR CHANCE**

Everyone talks about the race problem.  
Everyone talks about the jobs closed to Negroes.  
Everyone talks about F. E. P. C.

Last year, it stopped right there. Negroes gave lip-service to the bill, but when it came to action, too few were around. Negroes, who had the most to gain from FEPC, donated only \$300. of the \$7500 needed to finance the campaign. Negroes did not show their support by turning out in large numbers at rallies, or at the General Assembly when the bill was brought up for debate.

This year, we have a chance to do things differently. We have a chance to convince the legislators that we as a group are united one hundred percent behind the Fair Employment Practices Bill. At the Mammoth Rally at the Arsenal, we can show the legislators our strength, and demonstrate our sincere, complete support for the bill.

This is our chance to do our talking where it will do some good. This is our chance to do more than idle talk. Too often we've allowed the door of Opportunity to open, and then slam shut because we didn't put a foot in to keep it open. ....

We've seen what happened. Let us not miss the chance on Friday at the Arsenal.

*The Providence Chronicle*

February 21, 1948

Grades 9-12

## **Here is Our Chance**

After reading Document #3, create a broadside (poster) advertising the rally. Include the time, place and most of all the purpose of the event. Images may also be included. You want people to both attend the rally and financially support the cause.

A large, empty rounded rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for drawing a broadside poster. The box is centered on the page and occupies most of the lower two-thirds of the page.



**THE AWFUL TRUTH**

By Charles Bentley



**"and anudder thing.. You all ain't even got a FEPC!"**

*The Providence Chronicle*  
February 21, 1948

## Cartoon Analysis Worksheet

<b>Level 1</b>	
Visuals	Words (not all cartoons include words)
1. List the objects or people you see in the cartoon.	1. Identify the cartoon caption and/or title.  2. Locate three words or phrases used by the cartoonist to identify objects or people within the cartoon.  3. Record any important dates or numbers that appear in the cartoon.
<b>Level 2</b>	
Visuals	Words
2. Which of the objects on your list are symbols?  3. What do you think each symbol means?	4. Which words or phrases in the cartoon appear to be the most significant? Why do you think so?  5. List adjectives that describe the emotions portrayed in the cartoon.





## Here is Our Chance

Document # 5

### F. E. P. C.—BORN JULY 1, 1949

On Friday, July 1, the Fair Employment Practices Commission of Rhode Island becomes a reality, and the F. E. P. C. law passed by the Rhode Island General Assembly earlier this year will be officially in operation.

Gov. John O. Pastore has chosen a group of outstanding citizens to form this first Commission. To these men is entrusted the job of careful and efficient administration of the new law, for upon their interpretation of the law, and their administration of it will depend, in very large measure, the success or failure of F. E. P. C. in this state. We believe they will see to it that F.E.P.C. in Rhode Island will be just as successful as similar statutes are proving in other states.

The commission will face many tests during the coming weeks—it must organize, gather a staff, and make decisions relative to the scope of its work. It will take some little time before the actual work of receiving and processing complaints will begin, if the experience of F. E. P. C.'s in other states is approximated.

It is well, therefore, that we do not look upon July 1 as marking the end of all of the employment difficulties faced by minority groups in Rhode Island. The effective date of the new law will by no means mean the ushering in of an economic Utopia here. It will be but the beginning of an era which will see an end to discrimination in employment because of race, religion or national origin.

We should remember that FEPC is not in any sense an employment agency which can find jobs for people. It will receive, investigate, and pass upon complaints of discrimination—complaints which may be filed by the aggrieved person, organizations chartered for the purpose of combating discrimination of racism, or the commission may institute the investigation.

Persons making complaints should be willing to give all of the facts, and should be willing to go through with the whole case, provided the complaint is accepted by the commission as a valid case of discrimination because of race, etc. This latter is important, for in Massachusetts and New York F. E. P. Commissions have dismissed many complaints because of lack of evidence of racial discrimination were not qualified for the jobs they sought; and were denied them for this reason—or so the respondents stated—and when the Commission investigated the complainant's qualifications, and found them wanting, the discrimination complaint had to be dismissed.

F. E. P. C. is not an employment cure-all. It will work in the employment field to educate employees and employers to the fact that the right to work is a civil right, and to deny this right to any person because of his race, religion or national origin is to violate one of the basic tenets of American democracy. In this job we can all be helpful if we will attempt to understand the functions of the commission, the purposes of the law, and our relations to all of them. For this new baby is the responsibility of all of us, to nurture, to encourage, to encourage, to help it gain in strength.

*The Providence Chronicle*

June 25, 1949

Grades 9-12

## **Here is Our Chance Document Analysis**

1. List the tasks at hand for newly appointed commission.

a.

b.

c.

2. What is the purpose and the mission of FEPC?

3. What won't the FEPC do?

4. Why have FEPC cases in New York and Massachusetts been dismissed? How can this be avoided the citizens of Rhode Island?

Grades 9-12

## **Here is Our Chance**

### **DBQ Question**

The African-American community in Rhode Island seized upon the opportunity to begin changing the status quo in employment and economic opportunity in the state during WWII and in the post war years. Using the documents within this unit, discuss this movement toward change. What methods for change were employed? How does this relate to the growing civil rights movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> century?