



# Reconsidering Roosevelt on Race: How the Presidency Paved the Road to Brown

*Kevin J. McMahon*

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Many have questioned FDR's record on race, suggesting that he had the opportunity but not the will to advance the civil rights of African Americans. Kevin J. McMahon challenges this view, arguing instead that Roosevelt's administration played a crucial role in the Supreme Court's increasing commitment to racial equality—which culminated in its landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

McMahon shows how FDR's attempt to strengthen the presidency and undermine the power of conservative Southern Democrats dovetailed with his efforts to seek racial equality through the federal courts. By appointing a majority of rights-based liberals deferential to presidential power, Roosevelt ensured that the Supreme Court would be receptive to civil rights claims, especially when those claims had the support of the executive branch.



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