

Tanya Domi: Hi, this is Tanya Domi. Welcome to the Thought Project, recorded at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, fostering groundbreaking research and scholarship in the arts, social sciences, and sciences. In this space, we talk with faculty and doctoral students about the big thinking and big ideas generating cutting-edge research, informing New Yorkers and the world.

This week's guest, Blanche Wiesen Cook, a distinguished professor of history at John Jay College of Criminal Justice and the Graduate Center at CUNY, where she also teaches in the women's studies program. Cook is the author or editor of seven books, including the generative trilogy of Eleanor Roosevelt, the only trilogy published about an American woman, which she completed 35 years after embarking on what she presumed to be a one volume biography. Eleanor Roosevelt: Volume 3, The War Years and After, 1939-1962, the final volume, was completed in 2016.

Up until she took on the Eleanor Roosevelt project, Cook considered herself a "hard historian", or a military historian, and published the controversial *The Declassified Eisenhower: A Divided Legacy of Peace and Political Warfare* in 1981, which made the *New York Times* bestsellers list. Both figures, Eisenhower's and Roosevelt's legacies, can serve to inform the public's understanding of contemporary events. Blanche Cook is the expert historian to help us contextualize today's events in a world that seems challenged at every turn.

Welcome to the Thought Project, Professor Cook.

Blanche W. Cook: Thank you so much, Tanya. It's wonderful to be with you.

Tanya Domi: You have been quoted as saying that Eleanor Roosevelt has infinite possibilities, quoting your friend Joseph Lash, on how her life might inform us on how to really negotiate a troubled world, using the power made available to her by her husband, FDR. As a human being who was the wife of FDR, arguably one of the greatest presidents in history, who tapped her to help him negotiate the Depression and World War II, what was her greatest legacy, do you think, from the war years?

Blanche W. Cook: I think her greatest legacy was that she really loved people, and she cared about people, and she traveled the world, embracing people. She never said, let me tell you. She always said, tell me, what do you want? What do you need? Everywhere she went, that was her message.

She had a great friend who was a wonderful British activist, Lady Stella Reading, who said Eleanor Roosevelt's first and most exclusive love was the people, the people of the world. Eleanor Roosevelt, before anybody, really understood that we are all connected, and in a very memorable speech in 1934 against segregation, in 1934, she said, "We must understand, we will all go ahead

together or we will all go down together." It's that conviction that inspired all of her work, and her final legacy, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

I think it's really important when Joe Lash said Eleanor Roosevelt was infinite, he meant, there are infinite stories to tell, because she went everywhere, she spoke to everybody, and she never stopped growing and changing. Her legacy really is enduring, and we need her now. We need her voice now more than ever, one could argue, and she has left us a great and challenging legacy.

Tanya Domi: It's very interesting that she gave that speech in 1934, which was 20 years before Brown v. Board. It was 28 years before ... Actually, I take that back ... Truman desegregated the military in 1948. She was a woman ahead of her time, and you've been quoted as saying that the one thing that she failed at was that she did not convince FDR of actualizing desegregation or really leaning forward against racism in terms of policy.

Blanche W. Cook: That's really true, and FDR, given that he was the most progressive president we've had, was also a great compromiser. We have to remember the Democratic Party was dominated by the Dixiecrats, who could vote in the 1930s.

Tanya Domi: Right.

Blanche W. Cook: People who were people of color could not vote, and there were literacy tests. The literacy tests were imposed viciously. I personally failed a literacy test in 1963, when a group of us teaching at Hampton Institute, an historically black college, found out where the polling place was, and we went from Hampton to the polling place. There were three of us, ABD, all but dissertation, from Johns Hopkins and Harvard. And the three of us failed the literacy test. How do you fail a literacy test when you're a dissertation ... when you're a doctoral student? Well, they ask you to read the Declaration of Independence, or the first paragraph of the Constitution, and they read it, and they say, now, what does that mean? And no matter what you say, it's wrong 'cause you teach at Hampton, or you're a person of color, and that lasted until about 1968.

One could argue, given the resegregation and the change in our last election realities, it hasn't changed very much.

Tanya Domi: No.

Blanche W. Cook: It's gone back to a horrible moment in our history. So Eleanor Roosevelt pushed ... What FDR did give her was permission to speak up, permission to travel and to write her column and to unpack her heart, and he said, make me do it, meaning build a movement. If he built a movement and got his Congress, Congressional needs behind him ... But on racism, she didn't succeed. Nevertheless, she said ... This was in West Virginia, where the schools were segregated, and black schools were not good. Eleanor Roosevelt's full speech, which I quote in Volume 2 and again in Volume 3, in the spring of 1934, she said,

"How stupid we are! We should be investing all the money possible to make everyone's education excellent." It was that sense. We need excellent education, we need economic security, the end of war will come when people have education and economic security, and they can't be bulldozed and befuddled by disinformation and misinformation, which takes us into the political warfare phase of, alas, Dwight David Eisenhower's presidency.

Tanya Domi: Exactly. We're going to talk about that in a little bit. In a post ... She is a remarkable person, and I think that I've seen you actually speak about her in numerous places, including at the FDR Library, and you really bring her into life. You can imagine her, you can hear her voice through you, literally. In the post-war years, and this is after FDR died, arguably, her greatest legacy is her leadership role in leading the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the foundational document of the United Nations, and the beginning ... the document of origin, which we call in human rights education, which I teach ... it's part of the bill of rights, the International Bill of Rights.

She did, however ... I want to hear your thoughts on that. But she was urged to run for public office and elected office, but she chose not to seek it. It seems that she had some limits she maybe recognized, or she wasn't interested. I'd like to hear what you know about that, and what would she say in this moment? Despite the terrible political circumstances of the US government, there are five women running for president in the Democratic Party, four of which are without question all incredibly qualified to be president. And one is a woman of color.

Blanche W. Cook: Yes. I think she'd be absolutely thrilled that we're having this intense Democratic movement, because Eleanor Roosevelt really believed democracy would save us, the people would save us. I think she'd be pleased. When it came to people wanting her to be senator, there were people who wanted her to be vice president, and Clare Boothe Luce, who had started out her enemy, even suggested that she not only be nominated for vice president, but why not president? And Eleanor-

Tanya Domi: That's pretty remarkable, actually.

Blanche W. Cook: Yes. It really is.

Tanya Domi: If you know who Clare Boothe Luce is.

Blanche W. Cook: Right, right, the wife of the man who did Time Life fortune.

Tanya Domi: Yes.

Blanche W. Cook: And who Eleanor Roosevelt criticized very harshly when her play The Women was done. They became friends over time anyway, and I think somebody someday will write a full political biography of Clare Boothe Luce, which would be remarkable. We had worked together, but she didn't like a column I wrote,

and she said she changed her mind. She didn't want me to write her biography, but she was really, truly an amazing woman.

But Eleanor Roosevelt's response to such suggestions was, I'd rather be chloroformed than run for office.

Tanya Domi: That's right.

Blanche W. Cook: What she meant was she wanted to be free. She didn't want to be beholden to the party. She didn't want to be beholden to the compromises one in office has to make, and she wanted to be free to do her column and unpack her heart, which was her column from her point of view.

Tanya Domi: Her syndicated column, yeah.

Blanche W. Cook: Yes, My Day. Eleanor Roosevelt was really a writer. She wrote countless magazine articles, journal articles, plus her daily column. And, of course, about 12 books. She was writing all the time, and the idea of having to compromise in political office was horrible to her. On the other hand, she wanted-

Tanya Domi: She witnessed it with her husband and all the deals he had to cut.

Blanche W. Cook: Yes. But she wanted other people to run for office and to take ... for good Democrats to take back power whenever they lost power, and she was an activist to the end of her life.

So we should go back to the UN?

Tanya Domi: We should go back to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. There's a wonderful picture of her holding the UDHR unscrolled at the UN, and this is something I carry with me, because I became ... myself, I became a human rights advocate globally, and I teach about this, and to know that both FDR and ER played central roles in creating the UN ... This past year was the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and this is just something that I think not enough Americans know about, or ... 'cause I don't think we pay as much attention to it, and many people, particularly in the Republican Party, really criticize the UN endlessly.

Blanche W. Cook: Endlessly. For years, we stopped paying dues to the UN.

Tanya Domi: Yes.

Blanche W. Cook: We didn't pay dues. We removed ourselves from UNESCO.

Tanya Domi: Yeah, we just did that again.

Blanche W. Cook: And we have nothing but contempt for FAO, the Food Agricultural Organization, the World Health Organization, which feeds people. You mentioned ... It's really unbearable to know how many nations of the 200+ nations who have ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the US has not even had a conversation about the economic and social covenant.

Tanya Domi: That's true, that's true.

Blanche W. Cook: So one thing-

Tanya Domi: When haven't ratified CEDAW-

Blanche W. Cook: The women's-

Tanya Domi: The Convention and the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the Rights of the Child ... We are the only country in the world that has not ratified the rights of the child.

Blanche W. Cook: Right. It's unbearable. But let me just throw in one thing.

Tanya Domi: Yes, please.

Blanche W. Cook: George Herbert Walker Bush.

Tanya Domi: Yes.

Blanche W. Cook: Is the man responsible for ratifying the Political and Civil Rights Covenant.

Tanya Domi: That's true.

Blanche W. Cook: Nobody knows that, and nobody gives him credit, because the Democrats don't want to give him credit, and the Republicans don't want to give him credit. They don't want to mention it. But it really is interesting, and since there was big conversations recently about George Herbert Walker Bush, and there's a new book about him, I wondered if there was mention that it was a Republican, George Herbert Walker Bush, when the Republican Party still had liberal Republicans in it-

Tanya Domi: Is this the John Meacham book?

Blanche W. Cook: Yes.

Tanya Domi: That would make sense, he would note it.

Blanche W. Cook: Okay. But we're going to look to see if he did.

Tanya Domi: Okay.

Blanche W. Cook: Yeah, he didn't mention it.

Tanya Domi: I see.

Blanche W. Cook: On CSPAN, there was a conversation.

Tanya Domi: I see. One more question about Eleanor Roosevelt, and actually, this is one of great interest. You were the first historian to document ER's intimate relationship with journalist Lorena Hickok. How was that received among historians in the academy, like Joseph Lash, who apparently knew, but withheld it from his writings?

Blanche W. Cook: It's really interesting. I was working on Eisenhower, and Kate Stimson, who was my great friend, sent me books to review, lonely in Abilene, where-

Tanya Domi: I bet.

Blanche W. Cook: Yeah.

Tanya Domi: You were out there shooting guns and drinking liquor?

Blanche W. Cook: Yes, yes. I had friends. The local sheriff, I would go from the library, the archives, to the local sheriff, who had single malt in his office, and we would pop guns and play. Then I stayed with a family, the [Cenas 00:17:09], who-

Tanya Domi: That's a great story. That's a very great story.

Blanche W. Cook: Yeah. Then POWs would come from Kansas City on their motorcycles and take me away for the weekend. But except for that, I had nothing to do at night except read books. And one book she sent me was this really silly little book about Lorena Hickok and Eleanor Roosevelt, written by a woman who couldn't bear the idea that these [wedders 00:17:33] might be real.

So I reviewed the book, and I said, excuse me. This is a silly little book written by a homophobe. A cigar may not always be a cigar, but the northeastern corner of your mouth upon my lips is always the northeast corner. Then when I got home, I called Joe, who was a friend, because he had blurbed my Crystal Eastman book. This is a book that should stay in print forever, and you get to be friends with people who do that. I called him up, and I said, "Hey, Joe. What's up with you not having Hick in anything you've written?" Of course, he had written about four books on Eleanor Roosevelt.

Tanya Domi: Right.

Blanche W. Cook: He said, "I hated her. But let's have dinner." So we had dinner, and he said why he hated her was, she was very mean to him, and she was rather a bigot and an anti-Semite. Because she hated him, he hated her, and so on. He said, "But, you know, it's another story. You really should write it." It was to Joe that I first said, "Well, don't be ridiculous. I'm a hard historian. I write about military history."

Tanya Domi: Exactly, exactly.

Blanche W. Cook: Goddess forgive me. Joe said, "You're wrong," and he took me out to Hyde Park, and we went to the papers. He showed me what was there, and I realized I had a story. It was 1982, my Eisenhower book had just come out, and I thought, okay. I'll finish it for her centennial. My goal? 1984.

But it was amazing to go through that. The love letters are really quite incredible. They exist between both of them.

Tanya Domi: Where are they?

Blanche W. Cook: They are in the FDR library.

Tanya Domi: They're in the FDR library, you can actually look at them.

Blanche W. Cook: You can hold them. Well, in the old days, you could hold them in your hands.

Tanya Domi: You can't now.

Blanche W. Cook: You can't now. But that's what ... People were very surprised by my book, and it was a lot of people just couldn't believe it. For some people, Eleanor was a saint and a mermaid, like the author of that first book. But now, there are about five novels and two other books on ER and Hick. Their relationship is an industry now, and the world has completely changed.

Tanya Domi: That's right. They're sort of legitimized now. But she really was quite radical in some ways. ER ... FDR built Val-Hill-

Blanche W. Cook: Val-Kill.

Tanya Domi: Yeah, Val-Kill for her. On the same property, she had a house, and she had an apartment in the West Village, hanging out with principally women, but women who were in love with other women.

Blanche W. Cook: Right. Nancy Cook and [crosstalk 00:20:39].

Tanya Domi: Nancy Cook and-

Blanche W. Cook: And her best friends. By the way, let me just say, her best friends, Esther Lape, L-A-P-E-

Tanya Domi: Yes, I do know who she is.

Blanche W. Cook: ... at the 11th Street House was owned by Esther Lape. And her lover, who was Eleanor Roosevelt's attorney and business advisor.

Tanya Domi: Wow.

Blanche W. Cook: Nobody's written a book yet about Esther Lape, who is the most interesting woman, who really was a visionary and spent her life campaigning for what we now call single payer.

Tanya Domi: Single payer health insurance.

Blanche W. Cook: Single payer healthcare, yeah.

Tanya Domi: Health insurance, yeah.

Blanche W. Cook: So that everybody is covered, which is one of the few times Eleanor Roosevelt and Eisenhower worked together, 'cause when he wanted his 1956 Health Reinsurance ... what became the Health Reinsurance Act, he wanted essentially single payer, and he asked Eleanor Roosevelt and Esther Lape to come-

Tanya Domi: Help him.

Blanche W. Cook: ... help him with it. But he ... Again, Congress whittled it to death. It was supposed to be in the 1935 Social Security law, and the AMA lobbied it out of there.

Tanya Domi: Of course they did.

Blanche W. Cook: Then Eisenhower said, let's make it easy, just like in the military. Everybody covered.

Tanya Domi: Gets it.

Blanche W. Cook: And their families. That's what Eisenhower wanted. But his law, which is really all we still have, which is the Health Reinsurance Act ... When it got passed, he gave the pen he signed it with to Esther Lape in front of the press conference, and she waved it in front of the reporters, and she said, "Now, this represents just a puny little bone in the vertebrae of what I had in mind." Here we are. She fought until her death at the age of 100 in 1982 for single payer, and here we are, still fighting for the vision of these great women.



Tanya Domi: I hope you're recruiting a graduate student to write that book.

Blanche W. Cook: Can I just say one other word about-

Tanya Domi: Please.

Blanche W. Cook: Eleanor Roosevelt was not the primary author of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Tanya Domi: No, she chaired it. She chaired it.

Blanche W. Cook: She was the primary diplomat who got everybody to agree.

Tanya Domi: Yes, that's right.

Blanche W. Cook: And who would go out with the Soviets and have not only dinner, but take them to concerts and ballet, so they wouldn't veto any part of it, which they didn't. There's one very important person who was on that committee from India. Hansa Mehta. Again, there's not enough written about Hansa Mehta, the great Indian politician and diplomat and visionary. But she said to Eleanor Roosevelt one day, "Excuse me, Mrs. Roosevelt. I must protest. You say here, all men are born and created, blah blah blah, equal. But if you say all men, it will only be men in most countries." So they agreed to change it to all human beings are born with certain inalienable rights. So we have to give credit to Hansa Mehta.

Tanya Domi: That's excellent. Let's just go back to Lorena Hickok for one moment. She was an Associated Press reporter. She covered ... She was the first one by the AP who was directed to report on the First Lady. This is the first time it ever happened. Then she moved into the White House.

Blanche W. Cook: Right.

Tanya Domi: That is extraordinary. Can you talk about that, just for a minute?

Blanche W. Cook: Well, just for a minute, let me say not only ... At first she was really annoyed, because she had been given very big assignments, and she was annoyed to be given merely a First Lady. But then something happened, and they became, as we know, for a little while, inseparable. She did move into the White House, where she lived throughout the years, in the White House.

But let me just say two other things. One is that Eleanor Roosevelt was a serial romantic, and she was easily bored. At some point, her passionate friendship for Lorena Hickok subsided, and I think it lasted as a passionate friendship only about two or three years, so that by 1936, it's kind of over. Their friendship never ends, and they remain really great buddies. But Eleanor Roosevelt moves on.

Tanya Domi: To her bodyguard, right?

Blanche W. Cook: Well, Earl Miller, and you take a look at some of the great pictures of Earl Miller swimming in bathing trunks, sitting next to Eleanor. Clare, my partner Clare Coss, the playwright, doesn't agree with me, because I've created a "why not" category. But you know, why not? There's no evidence, because mysteriously all of his letters to Eleanor-

Tanya Domi: Disappeared.

Blanche W. Cook: ... have disappeared. There was one other thing I wanted to say about Hick. She was a great reporter who did marvelous stories, and encouraged Eleanor Roosevelt to do My Day and do her column.

Tanya Domi: Yes, yes. She was ... Yeah.

Blanche W. Cook: She was her editor and mentor for many of her books and articles. But unfortunately, Hick quit her job as AP reporter, because she couldn't maintain the distance she needed to maintain as reporter and what was happening in her heart. So she left journalism, and I think as many people do for the people they love ... But I think that was a very sad and unfortunate reality that that happened.

Tanya Domi: I see. It's pretty remarkable what you did. You get major, major, major props for acknowledging and documenting that relationship, because it breaks the mold in so many ways. Your seminal work on Eleanor Roosevelt overshadows how you began. In your book on Declassified Eisenhower, you actually played a central role in establishing really the legitimate exercise of the Freedom of Information Act in submitting FOIAs to obtain declassified documents about him at the State Department. Now, you've told me about that story in the past, but could you share that story with our listeners, 'cause it's quite remarkable what you did.

Blanche W. Cook: What happened was I was in Abilene, Kansas, looking at the papers, and everything I wanted to know about ... I'd ask for papers on Guatemala, and I'd ask for papers on Iran, and I'd ask for papers about major events. They would come with trolleys of boxes, and the boxes would be empty with little papers that said, these are all secret, classified, unavailable.

I took a plane out of Abilene back to New York. I always say, never go anywhere without your gang, and I called a meeting of my pals. I had then a syndicated column and a radio show, and I called a meeting of my journalist pals, my CCR pals. Mike Ratner, Presente, and my historian pals, Bill Preston and Gerry Markowitz. I said, we've got to do something. We don't know what's going on in our history, which means we don't know what's going on in our lives.

We founded the Fund for Open Information and Accountability, and FOIA Inc. had many great successes, but as a result, I was able to get most of Eleanor Roosevelt's classified papers out of the State Department, and her FBI file. And I want to say, we won a case in 1988 called the American Friends Service Committee versus Webster, a very important case, which gave us all the FBI files. I didn't really use them in my three volumes. I used State Department files in Volume 3. But now I'm thinking what I need to do is to show what was un-American in John Edgar Hoover's fantasia of un-Americanism. 80% of her file, which is one of the largest of all, over 5,000 pages ... 80% is what she said against segregation, against lynching, against discrimination. That's what's un-American.

Tanya Domi: That's pretty remarkable.

Blanche W. Cook: So, FOIA still exists, and of course, people who tell the truth ... One has to say something about this war on journalism that's going on, not only in the US, but across the world. Reporters who are telling the truth are being fired and killed and subpoenaed for treason. James Risen ... for telling the truth.

Tanya Domi: Yes, former investigative reporter for the New York Times. So, you wrote in Declassified Eisenhower, I'm quoting your writing ... "Eisenhower participated in his own cover up. His presidency involved a thorough and ambitious anticommunist crusade, marked by covert operations that depended on secrecy for their success. While he cannot be credited with inventing the political warfare wheel, he presided over its development." Did he not order the US coup against democratically elected Mosaddegh in Iran in 1954?

Blanche W. Cook: Mosaddegh, the Mohammad Mosaddegh, in 1953?

Tanya Domi: Yes, '53, rather. Excuse me.

Blanche W. Cook: He definitely orchestrated it. The US is responsible for the overthrow of Dr. Mosaddegh, which is really one of the greatest tragedies of our 20th century history in the ongoing residue-

Tanya Domi: And continues.

Blanche W. Cook: Absolutely.

Tanya Domi: This legacy continues into this present moment.

Blanche W. Cook: Absolutely.

Tanya Domi: Not only that, not only did he take out Mosaddegh ... It had been planned by Truman, but he actually carried it out. Was the violent coup, the US violent coup that took down democratically elected Guatemalan president Jacobo Árbenz in

June 1954 ... And all this was based, as you write in your book, on the US policy that began under Truman, which was to ... It was to curtail and abet ... to actually stop communism wherever it existed, and to eliminate communist sympathizers, probably in the US backyard, as in Guatemala. Is that not correct?

Blanche W. Cook: Absolutely. The National Security Council Act, which really by hook or by crook, by any means necessary, essentially, we are going to get rid of communist successes anywhere. But the real tragedy in both Iran in 1953 and Guatemala in 1954 is these were popularly elected, independent, not Soviet dominated people. If you look at Chapter 6 and 7 in the book on Guatemala, the great tragedy of overthrowing Árbenz, who was not a communist, who was a social democrat whose goal was at literacy ... to educate all the people. Then the second goal? It was really the United Fruit Company. The United Fruit Company that owned all that land, and it wasn't just fruits and vegetables. It was coffee beans, and later, it's the land, and the land is resource rich ... Whether there's oil or tungsten or precious metals. All of this is owned by the United Fruit Company.

So the nationalist, independent people say, well, let's get our land back. Let's take some of this land that is not used, land that is not being used. We can give to the landless campesinos, who are the starving farm workers and native peoples in the north and across the country that have nothing and are starving to death, and build education systems and take back our country.

Tanya Domi: That was a threat. That was the big threat.

Blanche W. Cook: And they called it communist, which it wasn't. It's really one of the permanent tragedies, the violence in Guatemala has not abated, and is also, like in Iran, an ongoing and horrific situation. We were talking about Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, and El Salvador, and we're talking about people leaving these countries. Well, why are they leaving? They're leaving partly because of the drought, and people are starving to death and there's no food. But they're also leaving because of US policies that have been consistently horrific and imperial, and really-

Tanya Domi: For decades.

Blanche W. Cook: For decades. Greed.

Tanya Domi: It's like the triumph of greed. Yes. You wrote ... I just want to say ... Did you want to say something?

Blanche W. Cook: As Eleanor Roosevelt said, we have been too aligned with the guards of Mammon. Greed will destroy us.

Tanya Domi: Well, that couldn't be said more ... in the present, couldn't be said more. You actually wrote about Eisenhower. Actually, it was about Reagan, when Reagan

was elected. That was a December 1980 New York Times oped, and you referenced Eisenhower. It was ... He was, in fact, despite this vehement anticommunism, it was the first rail of US foreign policy. It animated all the way through LBJ, and actually probably the ruination of his presidency, because outside of Vietnam, LBJ probably would've been considered a really tremendously great president for all he did. That's a judgment, that's my judgment, but you take Vietnam out of it, and he did pretty remarkable things.

Despite the fact that this president was a vehement opponent of communism in all its forms, he called himself, as you write, a militant liberal who understood that people wanted jobs, security, peace, and fulfillment. His classified diaries you obtained indicated that he wrote to John Foster Dulles, who's Secretary of State during his presidency, and wrote that his administration was committed to the development of policies that will bring the greatest good to the greatest number. The means must be lifted from the minds of men that fear disaster, poverty, and old age. He predicted, which is ... I thought, when I read this, I was just absolutely blown away ... He predicted that if the right wing of the Republican Party got control, that the party would no longer have its influence, and he would even consider organizing a third party. This was Dwight David Eisenhower. What do you have to say about this? It's really remarkable documentation of his presidency.

Blanche W. Cook: He really was, besides being a dirty trickster, he really was a militant liberal, and he never walked away from any phase of the New Deal, and he wanted to expand the New Deal, which he did with healthcare, and which he did ... He said at some point, we have to make sure that people who are not covered by Social Security are covered, which included all kinds of service workers that were not covered, black people, and it was Eisenhower ... You mentioned that Truman desegregated the military.

Tanya Domi: Yes, he did.

Blanche W. Cook: No, he didn't. He said it should be desegregated, but he didn't do anything about it. In 1958 ... Well, first in 1953, Eisenhower went around and fired every bird colonel who wouldn't desegregate the base. Then, in 1958, Eisenhower, by executive order, integrated blood plasma. He said all blood plasma is red. People don't know that blood was segregated. Black and white, Christian and Hebrew, through the Korean War. His pal Al Gruenther, who was head of the Red Cross said, "I can't do that. The south doesn't want integrated blood." And Eisenhower said, "Well, then the south won't get any blood. Done."

He really is this combination of a very decent man who called himself a militant liberal, and this unfortunate political warfare rogue who created, through CD Jackson, a propaganda empire of lies and surreptition.

Tanya Domi: Well, it's my understanding that Truman signed an executive order. That doesn't mean it was implemented immediately.

Blanche W. Cook: The president either enforces the law or ignores it.

Tanya Domi: Okay, okay. Point well taken. Mr. Eisenhower also established the HHS, Health and Human Services, and he also established the Women's Army Corps under the first leader ... Her name, Colonel Hobby, was the first-

Blanche W. Cook: Oveta Culp Hobby.

Tanya Domi: Yes.

Blanche W. Cook: Yes. Who was the first head of the WACs.

Tanya Domi: That's right.

Blanche W. Cook: And who, by the way, was a life member of the NAACP.

Tanya Domi: That's true, yes.

Blanche W. Cook: Her son, Bill Hobby, gave me a tour of her home in Texas, and showed me some of her private papers. She greeted Eleanor Roosevelt when Eleanor Roosevelt flew over to England during the war, and Eleanor Roosevelt was very impressed that she wanted the women in the military to be integrated, she wanted the women in the military to have full dignity and equal pay. She really was an amazing woman.

Tanya Domi: Yeah. That was the Women's Auxiliary Corps, then. I am a proud veteran of the Women's Army Corps. When I entered the Army in 1974, the WAC still existed. It was disestablished in 1978.

Blanche W. Cook: So you owe it to Oveta Culp Hobby.

Tanya Domi: Yes. I was taught about her as a young soldier. I want to thank you, Blanche Wiesen Cook, for this great podcast. Thanks for coming in today.

Blanche W. Cook: Thank you so much, Tanya.

Tanya Domi: Thanks for tuning into the Thought Project, and thanks to today's guest, distinguished professor Blanche Wiesen Cook.

The Thought Project is brought to you with production, engineering, and technical assistance by [Sara Fishman 00:42:06]. I'm Tanya Domi. Tune in next week.