

LETTER FROM THE NAACP TO PRESIDENT WOODROW WILSON

NEW YORK, AUG. 15, 1913

To WOODROW WILSON, President of the United States.

Dear Mr. President:

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, through its Board of Directors, respectfully protests against the policy of your Administration in segregating the colored employees in the Departments at Washington. It realizes that this new and radical departure has been recommended, and is now being defended, on the ground that by giving certain bureaus or sections wholly to colored employees they are thereby rendered safer in possession of their offices and are less likely to be ousted or discriminated against. We believe this reasoning to be fallacious. It is based on a failure to appreciate the deeper significance of the new policy; to understand how far reaching the effects of such a drawing of caste lines by the Federal Government may be, and how humiliating it is to the men thus stigmatized.

Never before has the Federal Government discriminated against its civilian employees on the ground of color. Every such act heretofore has been that of an individual State. The very presence of the Capitol and of the Federal flag has drawn colored people to the District of

Columbia in the belief that living there under the shadow of the National Government itself they were safe from the persecution and discrimination which follow them elsewhere because of their dark skins. Today they learn that, though their ancestors have fought in every war in behalf of the United States, in the fiftieth year after Gettysburg and Emancipation, this Government, founded on the theory of complete equality and freedom for all citizens, has established two classes among its civilian employees. It has set the colored apart as if mere contact with them were contamination. The efficiency of their labor, the principles of scientific management are disregarded, the possibilities of promotion if not now will soon be severely limited. To them is held out only the prospect of mere subordinate routine service without the stimulus of advancement to high office by merit, a right deemed inviolable for all white natives as for the children of the foreign born, of Italians, French and Russians, Jews and Christians who are now entering the Government service. For to such limitation this segregation will inevitably lead.

Who took the trouble to ascertain what our colored clerks thought about this order, to which their consent was never asked? Behind screens and closed doors they now sit apart as though leprous. Men and women alike have the badge of inferiority pressed upon them by Government decree. How long will it be before the hateful epithets of "nigger" and "Jim-Crow" are openly applied to these sections? Let any one experienced in Washington affairs, or any trained newspaper correspondent answer. The colored people themselves will tell you how soon sensitive and high-minded members of their race will refuse to enter the Government service which thus decrees what is to them the most hateful kind of discrimination. Indeed, there is a

widespread belief among them that this is the very purpose of these unwarrantable orders. And wherever there are men who rob the Negroes of their votes, who exploit and degrade and insult and lynch those whom they call their inferiors, there this mistaken action of the Federal Government will be cited as the warrant for new racial outrages that cry out to high Heaven for redress. Who shall say where discrimination once begun shall cease? Who can deny that every act of discrimination the world over breeds fresh injustice?

For the lowly of all classes you have lifted up your voice and not in vain. Shall ten millions of our citizens say that their civic liberties and rights are not safe in your hands? To ask the question is to answer it. They desire a "New Freedom," too, Mr. President, yet they include in that term nothing else than the rights guaranteed them by the Constitution under which they believe they should be protected from persecution based upon a physical quality with which Divine Providence has endowed them.

They ask therefore that you, born of a great section which prides itself upon its chivalry towards the humble and the weak, prevent a gross injustice which is an injustice none the less because it was actuated in some quarters by a genuine desire to aid those now discriminated against.

Yours, for justice,

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE.

By MOORFIELD STOREY, President.

W. E. BURGHARDT DuBois, Director of Publicity.

OSWALD GARRISON VILLARD, Chairman of the Board.