

Document 123

Papers of Harry S. Truman: Files of Charles S. Murphy

FEDERAL SECURITY AGENCY
OFFICE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR

January 2, 1948

Dear Charlie:

Would you be good enough to look
this over before Monday night.

O.R. Felt

Hon. Charles Murphy
The White House

CHARTER OF NEGRO RIGHTS

"The National Government of the United States must take the lead in safeguarding the civil rights of all Americans."

One out of every ten persons in the United States is a Negro. This country cannot afford to permit ten per cent of its people to continue to live in second-class citizenship.

We do not need a special program for Negroes. What we do need is a program to enable the Negro to participate in the normal life of the community.

The Federal Government should embark on the following ten-point program to this end:

I. RIGHT TO CONSTITUTIONAL PROTECTION

As citizens of the United States of America, as well as of their State of residence, Negroes may look to Federal protection of their constitutional rights.

Program

(1) Commission on Civil Rights, as an arm of the Executive Office of the President, to be charged with the continuous appraisal of the status of civil rights, and the efficiency of machinery to deal with such problems.

(2) Civil Rights Section of the Department of Justice, for effective legal action to prevent civil rights violations.

(3) Federal Anti-Lynching Act, as a means of affording protection seemingly unavailable to Negroes in certain areas of the country.

II. RIGHT TO VOTE

The most obvious mark of second-class citizenship is the inability of Negroes in certain parts of the country effectively to exercise their right to vote for public officials. The right to vote generally carries the opportunity to improve conditions in the community, and opens the door to public service.

Program

(1) Federal Anti-Poll Tax Act, to protect Negroes in the exercise of their fundamental rights and privileges as citizens to vote in public elections.

III. RIGHT TO WORK

"Equality of opportunity" is the American clarion-call to the world.

Program

(1) Full Employment Program, to assure an economic climate conducive to the fullest utilization of the productive capacities of all our people.

(2) Federal Fair Employment Practices Act, to assure equality of opportunity to private employment regardless of race, color, creed, or national origin.

(3) Labor Unions, amendment of National Labor Relations Act to deny rights under Act to unions discriminating against Negroes.

(4) United States Employment Service, special instructions to assure non-discriminatory handling of applicants for employment.

(5) Federal Civil Service, vigorous policy to assure non-discriminatory employment and promotion policies, on all levels of service.

(6) Apprenticeship Program, to assure more positive efforts to equalize opportunities for apprenticeships, as a means of industrializing Negro labor.

(7) Business Counseling, to assure a more positive and effective program of advice and counsel to persons planning establishment of small businesses, so that Negroes seeking to become small businessmen may be better equipped to do so.

IV. RIGHT TO HEALTH

The health of a country is no better than the health of its most disadvantaged groups. Because their residence is largely in rural areas, because of their lower economic strength, and because of community neglect, Negroes, especially in the Southern States, are direly in need of more and better medical and health services.

Program

(1) National Health Insurance, to assure needed preventive and curative services to all people, and thereby assure reasonable payments to doctors.

(2) Public Health Services in every county of America, expansion to provide basic public health, and nursing services in every rural county on a full-time basis.

(3) Maternal and Child Health Services, intensified to assure these basic services to every rural county.

(4) Adequate Number of Doctors, Dentists, Nurses and other Professional Personnel, a program of scholarships, expansion and opening of existing facilities, and development of new opportunities to assure an adequate number of properly trained professional Negroes.

(5) Health and Medical Facilities, amendment of the Hospital Survey and Construction Act to (a) provide greater Federal financial participation in the construction of rural hospitals and health centers; (b) provide funds for maintenance of hospitals in rural areas, until some general health program is adopted; and (c) open hospitals constructed with Federal participation to Negro internes, residents, and staff members, as well as to general practice by Negro physicians.

(6) School Health Act, to assure earlier diagnosis and treatment of preventable or curable illnesses.

(7) School Lunch Act, expansion of program to assure wider coverage of rural schools.

V. RIGHT TO EDUCATION

No one aspect of Negro life offers more hope for the future of America than improvement in the educational opportunities open to Negroes.

Program

(1) Federal Aid to Education, to correct the sub-standard conditions in the South, and thereby raise the whole educational level of Negroes. Assurances are necessary for equitable distribution of the Federal funds.

(2) Scholarships for College and Professional Education, to assure the Nation that able young people have the opportunity to obtain as high an educational level as their capacities permit, without regard to race, color, creed, national origin, or their lack of financial resources.

(3) Vocational Education, to assure equality of opportunity and to help Negroes take themselves out of the unskilled labor category, the existing vocational education acts, and agricultural grants to land-grant colleges be amended to require an equitable allocation of funds for Negroes within the respective States.

VI. RIGHT TO SOCIAL SECURITY

Social Security represents the basic minimum of financial protection which the American people regard as essential to decency and self-respect. Because of the limitations of the present social security program, Negroes are among the groups failing to receive the full benefits of social security legislation.

Program

(1) Old-Age and Survivors Insurance, the limitations of coverage omitting agricultural and domestic employees from coverage bear particularly heavily on Negroes since they are in overwhelming majority engaged in these uncovered pursuits. This could be remedied by extension of social security coverage and strengthening of the entire program.

(2) Unemployment Compensation, same situation prevails. By extending coverage to be co-extensive with the expanded old-age and survivors insurance program, Negroes could be brought more fully under unemployment insurance protection. Enactment of a program of dependency benefits would also be of distinct advantage to Negroes because of their typically larger than average size family.

(3) Public Assistance, the adequacy of relief benefits varies among the States according to their fiscal resources. Negroes live in larger proportions in the rural States least able to provide adequate relief, and are therefore more directly affected thereby.

This situation would be remedied by enactment of legislation providing Federal grants for general relief, and providing for Federal assumption of a larger share of the cost of all types of public assistance in the poorer States.

VII. RIGHT TO BEAR ARMS

Citizenship carries its duties as well as its rights. Discrimination in the call to duty is no less invidious than discrimination in protection of rights. Present military and naval traditions subject Negroes to humiliating discriminations barring full service in the Armed Forces.

Program

- (1) Abolition of segregation within Armed Services and in National Guard, and elimination of the policy of assigning Negroes, in disproportionate numbers, to service units.
- (2) Assurance of equal opportunities for enlistment, commissions, and promotions.
- (3) Admission to Military, Naval, and Coast Guard Academies and all other service schools on the basis solely of merit and ability.

VIII. RIGHT TO HOUSING

A place to live decently and in healthy surroundings is the ambition of every American family. Negroes have continuously suffered from substandard homes and have been kept in ghettos.

Program

- (1) Public Housing, to assist private and public construction of homes in rural and urban areas. All housing legislation should include non-discrimination protections.
- (2) Restrictive Covenants, government operations involving loans, grants, or other means of financing residential construction should bar all restrictive covenants.

IX. RIGHT TO PUBLIC SERVICES

Public services intended to be available to all the people should not be denied or restricted to anyone because of race, color, creed, or national origin.

Program

(1) General Policy, to establish a national policy consonant with the obligations it assumed under the Charter of the United Nations and the Act of Chapultepec, the Congress should enact a law stating that discrimination and segregation, based on race, color, creed, or national origin, in the rendering of all public services by the Federal Government is contrary to public policy.

(2) Interstate Transportation, to implement and supplement rulings of the Supreme Court, Congress should enact a law prohibiting discrimination or segregation, by public or private officials, based on race, color, creed, or national origin, in interstate transportation and all the facilities thereof.

X. THE RIGHT TO PLAY

Recreation is an important aspect of the American way of life.

Program

(1) Public Works Program, all Federal programs of grants or loans for public works should be conditioned upon provisions assuring non-discrimination in the use of all recreational facilities.