

Document 54

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THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON

17 July 1948

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. CLARK CLIFFORD:

Attached is a letter which I had intended sending to Mr. Grant Reynolds and Mr. A. Philip Randolph today. I saw in this morning's New York Times, however, a brief news item which stated that Mr. Reynolds and Mr. Randolph had written or wired the President, requesting that he issue an Executive Order for the purpose of carrying out the civil rights plank in the platform.

In order to avoid any mix-up in the matter, I am sending the proposed letter to you--for I imagine that you will be working on any similar requests which the President has received from Mr. Reynolds, Mr. Randolph, and others. I would appreciate any suggestions you may have on this matter, and, as you will note, my proposed letter is in reply to a letter from Messrs. Reynolds and Randolph to the President--Matt Connelly having referred the letter to this office last week.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Forrestal".

James Forrestal

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON

17 July 1948

Dear Mr. Reynolds and Mr. Randolph:

Your letter of June 29, addressed to the President, has been referred to me for reply.

In your letter, you mention the possibility of "an executive order abolishing all segregation and discrimination from the armed forces."

Since your letter was written, the Democratic Convention has adopted a platform which, among other things, "calls upon the Congress to support our President in guaranteeing these basic and fundamental rights; . . . The right of equal treatment in the service and defense of our nation."

You will recall that when the Selective Service legislation was being considered by the Armed Services Committee of the Senate, an amendment was proposed which would have had the effect of permitting every person in the armed services to state whether or not he wished to serve in a unit consisting exclusively of members of his own race. The Committee asked for my comments on this proposal, and I informed the Committee that I was opposed to including in the Selective Service bill a provision which would compel segregation.

In my opinion, the field of inter-racial relations is one in which definite progress has been made by the military. Furthermore, it is a field in which even greater progress will be made in the future.

Some of the supporters of the proposed amendment which I mentioned earlier stated that this amendment was necessary in order to prevent the possible issuance of an executive order prohibiting segregation -- the very step which you now propose.

As evidence of the possibility of such a step, the supporters of the amendment cited the President's civil rights message of February 2, 1948.

The specific language of the President's message reads as follows:

"During the recent war and in the years since its close we have made much progress toward equality of opportunity in our Armed Services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin. I have instructed the Secretary of Defense to take steps to have the remaining instances of discrimination in the Armed Services eliminated as rapidly as possible. The personnel policies and practices of all the Services in this regard will be made consistent."

The instructions to which the President referred in this message were delivered to me orally, and my reply to the President was that these instructions were in accord with my own conception of my responsibilities, under unification. I referred to the fact that I felt that substantial progress had been made by all of the Services, and that I felt confident that further progress could be made — and that such progress, among other things, could take the form of a more nearly uniform approach to inter-racial problems by the three Services.

In addition to the matters I have mentioned up to this point, I should like to call your attention to a meeting which I held on April 26, to discuss many of the problems to which your letter refers. A list of the persons invited to attend this meeting is attached for your information. I am presently awaiting the recommendations of the group which attended the April 26 meeting — and I am in hopes that one outgrowth of the meeting will be the setting up of an advisory panel to assist the Military Establishment in handling the many difficult problems facing the armed services in the field of inter-racial relations. In this general connection, I think that you may be interested in a letter we recently received from Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune, a copy of which I attach for your information.

Any concrete and practicable suggestions which either of you may have will be greatly appreciated. I would be less than candid with you, however, if I failed to say that Mr. Randolph's much-publicized testimony before the Congress seems to me to be a step in the wrong direction.

Sincerely,

James Forrestal

Mr. Grant Reynolds, National Chairman
Mr. A. Philip Randolph, National Treasurer
Committee Against Jim Crow in Military
Service and Training
Suite 301, 217 West 125th Street
New York 27, New York

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DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL DEFENSE
Washington, D.C.

NATIONAL DEFENSE CONFERENCE

on Negro Affairs

The Pentagon, 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM - Monday, April 26, 1948

List of conferees who have accepted the invitation of
Secretary Forrestal to participate.

Dr. Sadie T. M. Alexander
40 South Nineteenth Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune
President
National Council of Negro Women, Inc.
1318 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C.

Dr. John W. Davis, President
West Virginia State College
Institute, West Virginia

Mr. Truman K. Gibson
Attorney at Law
3507 South Parkway
Chicago, Illinois

Reverend Bishop J. W. Gregg
1150 Washington Boulevard
Kansas City, Kansas

Mr. Charles Houston
Attorney at Law
615 "F" Street, NW
Washington, D.C.

Reverend John H. Johnson
St. Martins Church
230 Lenox Avenue
New York, New York

Dr. Mordecai Johnson, President
Howard University
Washington, D.C.

Mr. P. B. Young, Jr.
Norfolk Journal and Guide
Norfolk, Virginia

Mr. Ira F. Lewis, President
The Pittsburgh Courier
2628 Centre Avenue
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Dr. Benjamin E. Mays
President
Morehouse College
Atlanta, Georgia

Mr. Loren Miller
Attorney at Law
1105 East Vernon Avenue
Los Angeles, California

Mr. Hopson E. Reynolds
International Benevolent and
Protective Order of Elks
1416 Broad Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Dr. Channing H. Tobias
Director
Phelps-Stokes Foundation
101 Park Avenue
New York, New York

Mr. Willard Townsend, President
or
Mr. George L. P. Weaver
United Transport Service Employees
2452 State Avenue
Chicago, Illinois

Mr. Walter White
Executive Secretary, NAACP
20 West 40th Street
New York, New York

James C. Evans
21 April 1948

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF NEGRO WOMEN, INC.
(Affiliated with the National Council of Women
of the United States, Inc., and International
Council of Women of the World)

1318 Vermont Avenue, Northwest
Washington 5, D. C.
Telephone: Columbia 4491

July 1, 1948

The Honorable
Kenneth C. Royall
Secretary of the Army
Pentagon Building
Washington, D. C.

Dear Sir:

It has come to our attention that you have released to us three additional ROTC units designed to serve Negro youth for training as officers - one in Florida, my own state; one in Louisiana and one in Maryland.

I do want, for the National Council of Negro Women, a large organization Mr. Secretary, representing 800,000 women of this country, to extend our gratitude and congratulations on this definite forward step toward the goal we all seek. This will enable our sons to equip themselves for leadership responsibilities in the protection of their own country. Seventy-five per cent of our Negro soldiers come from the South and it is very significant and important that at this time this open door of opportunity they so badly need and richly deserve should be opened to them by your hands. This step will encourage the setting up of opportunities for our WACS, WAVES, SPARS and WAFS to prepare themselves as well for the task that lies ahead. I shall be happy to emphasize this important opportunity for patriotic service.

I am hoping, Mr. Secretary, that this forward step that you have taken will prove an incentive to the next stride you will make in perfecting the training and utilization of all our man power and our women power.

Please know how grateful we are and how happy we shall be to cooperate in any way that we can.

Sincerely yours,

(signed)

Mary McLeod Bethune
Founder-President