

John Sengstacke to Truman Gibson, Jr., with attached letter,
February 7, 1945. White House File, Nash Papers.

21-6

NEGRO NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

Office of
The President
3435 Indiana Avenue
CHICAGO 16, Ill.

February 7, 1945

Mr. Truman K. Gibson, Jr.
Civilian Aide to the
Secretary of War
War Department
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Gibson:

Please find attached a copy of our letter on the
subject of Military Conscription.

Your comments on this matter will be appreciated.

Very truly yours,

s/ John H. Sengstacke
John H. Sengstacke



February 7, 1945

President Franklin D. Roosevelt
The White House
Washington, D. C.



My dear Mr. President:

In your message to the Congress on the State of the Union, you expressed the necessity for universal military training after the war. Likewise, the War Department has made public the fact that future plans proceed from the basic assumption that a system of universal military training will be enacted by appropriate legislation. It is in this connection that the Executive Committee of the Negro Newspaper Publishers Association respectfully invites your attention to the necessity of avoiding the war time policies and practices of both the Army and Navy in the treatment of Negro personnel of these services.

This letter is addressed to you, because legislative safeguards and protective clauses in laws are not in themselves sufficient to provide for the full and fair utilization of Negroes. Our experiences with the non-discrimination clauses in the Selective Service and Training Act of 1940 have convinced us of this. Further, there must be a will and determination on the part of the Armed Services to meet racial issues squarely. Progress has been made during the last four years in the inclusion and utilization of Negroes in the Army and Navy; but it is pertinent to point out that this has resulted from specific attempts to meet bad conditions and not from advance planning.

Since 1940, the expansion of both services has been along hit-or-miss lines. In the Army, it was early apparent that no plans existed prior to 1940 to make full use of all available manpower. In October of that year, the situation became so serious that the White House announced the ratio by which Negroes would participate and be utilized in the Army. That ratio has been followed by the War Department. In the Navy, Negroes were not included prior to the war, except as mess men, and no plans were made for their inclusion and utilization in other capacities until the Naval voluntary recruitment program failed to meet Navy Department needs, and the Navy was forced to obtain manpower through the operation of the Selective Service System. All policies of the Navy with respect to Negroes have evolved since 1942.

February 7, 1945

As between the services, and even within them, there is little consistency in approaching racial matters.

In addition to lack of prior plans and the inconsistency that exists within and between the services, readers of our papers have been disturbed particularly by the apparent inflexibility of both the services, and especially the Army, on racial matters. An example is furnished by the rigid adherence by the War Department to the policy of segregation. This has resulted not only in separate military units, but also in limitations on the assignment of Negroes, regardless of competence and ability.

Further, the operation of this policy is unsound from a military standpoint. As an example: The Army has recently called for the commissioning of Clinical Psychologists from the ranks. Despite the availability of Negroes trained in this field, only one Negro has received such a commission, because it is against Army policy to station Negro officers in general hospitals where this work is being conducted. This same situation applies in varying degrees to doctors, lawyers, nurses and other trained personnel who have either volunteered for or been inducted into military service.

We, therefore, respectfully suggest that the following steps be initiated with appropriate publicity:

1. The Army and Navy be directed to proceed immediately with the preparation of plans looking to the fair and complete utilization and integration of Negroes in the peacetime Army and Navy in all branches and grades, both enlisted and commissioned.
2. In accordance with these plans, a uniform racial policy should be developed for the Army and Navy with an accompanying consistency in the treatment of members of minority races in the services.

We are convinced, Mr. President, that military services organized and trained in this manner will constitute the best defense of our national security and the surest guarantee of the maintenance of our ideals.

Faithfully yours,

John H. Sengstacke

blind cc ; Congressman Dawson
Congressman Powell
Truman K. Gibson
Colonel Campbell C. Johnson