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Neg in Army

REMARKS OF HOWARD C. PETERSEN, THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF WAR,
AT LUNCHEON FOR NEGRO NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION
MARCH 1, 1946

I am glad to have the opportunity of discussing with you the report of the Gillem Board, since I will, as the Secretary has said, be largely concerned with its implementation. In this connection, I fully support the position taken by the Board that a strong policy weakly enforced will be of little value to the Army. If the policy is to be enforced vigorously, as I think it should be, it will need to be understood thoroughly.

Basically, I think we all understand that there can be no single magic solution to the Army's problems in the racial field. The problem must be viewed, as the Board has done, as one of bringing about a continuing and progressive development. The important thing is that the objective should be agreed upon and that the initial steps should constitute a firm foundation for further progress.

I think that you will find that this has been the approach of the Board. They have not thought it possible to lay down a rigid formula to govern all stages of future development. One of the lessons we have learned from our past experience is that we must avoid such rigidity in our thinking and in our policy.

The Board, in the study that the Secretary has described, has recommended a program of broader utilization of Negro manpower in the post-war Army, with increased emphasis on assignment of officers and men on the basis of ability and the use, as a matter of policy, of composite and mixed units. Segregation of Negroes into separate units will not be required as a matter of policy, although it is anticipated that for some time most Negroes will be used in Negro units, often constituting part of larger white or composite units. There should be far more frequent assignment of individual Negroes with special skills to over-head and special units without regard to race.

I agree with the objectives stated in the report of the Board and I believe that it constitutes a sound basis for future planning. To carry these policies into effect, the Army will need the support of Negroes, including the Negro press, and I will welcome the opportunity of discussing with you in the future the specific problems that are bound to arise.

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