

# NAACP

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1790 BROADWAY

NEW YORK, N. Y. 10019

245-2100

Dear Friend:

June 14, 1971

Recently, a white man of unquestioned liberal views remarked in my presence that he was "tired of the race problem" and wished "that it would just go away."

My initial reaction to this seemingly harsh remark was undiluted shock, followed by the observation that "every Negro American is tired of the race problem, since, after all, we have had to live with it from the day we were born."

It is difficult for white Americans to comprehend what it is like in America, even in 1971, to be black. From birth to grave, blacks encounter manifestations of racial prejudice in virtually every aspect of our lives. If it is now true that we can enjoy the rights of eating at most restaurants and lunch counters, of sitting where we please on a bus or an airplane, or of using a rest room in a service station, it is also true that most Negroes cannot even afford the price of a restaurant meal or a plane trip.

As the latest federal statistics show, more than half of all Negro families in 1969 had a total earning capacity at or below the poverty level of \$3,900. One major cause of this poverty is that, despite all the laws to the contrary, Negroes are still systematically denied entry into many occupations, especially the high-paying skilled trades. The most flagrant overall example of this illegal and immoral bigotry is in the building trades industry, as I have discussed more fully in one of the enclosures. Despite many promises, despite even the genuine efforts by many labor leaders in the past few years, the proportion of black workers in the higher paid crafts is still negligible; by far the vast majority of Negroes employed in construction are in the low-paying, unskilled categories. This year we are launching a massive, coordinated national attack on the lily-white building trades across the nation.

Another major cause of Negro poverty is the lingering, but still pervasive, racial discrimination in the nation's school systems. Seventeen years after our famous landmark Supreme Court decision, the vast majority of black and white school children are still attending segregated schools. Southern die-hards continue to evade the law of the land. Despite its blatant illegality, they are diverting large amounts of public money, textbooks, furniture, etc. to "private academies" set up solely to perpetuate racial discrimination. The net result is that Negro youngsters continue to be short-changed in the quality and duration of their education. Then, when they enter the labor market, they are told that they lack the education or skills to qualify for decent jobs.

One of the most glaring examples of evasion and collusion by the local white power structure to perpetuate segregated schooling came to light recently in Lamar County, Georgia, where the U.S. Justice Department has joined us to bring suit to force compliance with the civil rights laws. Our field staff have been working in Lamar (and scores of other Southern communities) to reverse the long-standing pattern of racist exclusion. Enclosed is a copy of the field report to me, listing the principal violations.

(continued)

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THE SPECIAL CONTRIBUTION FUND IS THE ONLY TAX-DEDUCTIBLE CHANNEL FOR AIDING THE WORK OF THE NAACP,  
A NATION-WIDE MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZATION WITH 1731 BRANCHES THROUGHOUT ALL 50 STATES.

An equally disgraceful vestige of racism affects the treatment of Negroes within the armed forces. Since the First World War, the NAACP has led the fight for equality in our military services. More than 55 years later, we find that, despite progress, much discrimination remains. I am not talking only about the high proportion of black soldiers in the front lines in Vietnam, or the number of black casualties in combat there. I am referring as well to patterns of discrimination in non-combat assignments in the United States and Europe. Recently, as one of the enclosures relates, an NAACP team surveyed the situation of black servicemen stationed in Germany as the result of numerous complaints to us. We found that some commanders were using questionable methods of confinement to prevent black soldiers from expressing their discontent. At times, more than half of the soldiers confined to the stockade were black, four times their proportion--and almost one-third of these were confined without trial, then released rather than have charges pressed against them. As a result, we are pressing for a program of civilian lawyers to aid Negro G.I.'s.

The point is this: if young Negro men are being asked to serve their country and even to sacrifice their lives for America, the least America can do for them is to insure equal treatment while in uniform. Further, how can our countrymen expect these young men to risk injury or death in the name of freedom if they cannot share in all the rights of freedom at home?

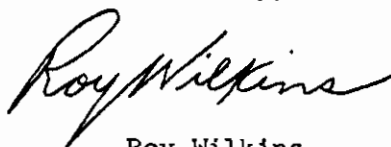
This, I think, crystallizes America's most fundamental dilemma: Negroes are asked to accept all of the restraints and responsibilities of a democratic society but are still asked to wait for their democratic rights to be fulfilled.

Well, the time for waiting is long past. We of the NAACP must continue and intensify the task of forcing the pace of progress. In the months ahead, we are determined to break the strangle hold of racism in lily-white unions, in suburban housing practices, in foot-dragging school systems, in the double standards practiced by the armed forces--indeed, in every facet of our national life.

To undertake what in effect constitutes expanded programs during the current period of economic decline involves a certain amount of optimism. It is premised on our faith that most of our friends and supporters will renew and expand their previous support, that we will not experience the historic pattern of last to be helped, first to be dropped. Our current level of programs funded by the tax-deductible Special Contribution Fund is slightly over \$2 million annually. To achieve the objectives we have already outlined will involve a fifty percent increase in income; we hope you will consider this in making your 1971 contribution.

The time has come, as our young might phrase it, to "put it all together." With our unique mass membership base and our vast structure of local branches, we have the machinery to do just this. Money is the fuel for this machinery to work. We hope you will respond now--as generously as possible--so that we may sustain our leadership in the civil rights struggle and further the ultimate goal of a truly democratic, integrated society.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Roy Wilkins". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Roy Wilkins