How did Belle La Follette Resist Racial Segregation in Washington D.C., 1913-1914?

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How Did Belle La Follette Oppose Racial Segregation in Washington, D.C., 1913-1914?

Abstract

Beginning in 1913, progressive reformer Belle Case La Follette wrote a series of articles for the "women's page" of her family's magazine, denouncing the sudden racial segregation in several departments of the federal government. Those articles reveal progressive efforts to appeal specifically to women to combat injustice, and also demonstrate the ability of women to voice important political opinions prior to suffrage.
How Did Belle La Follette Oppose Racial Segregation in Washington, D.C., 1913-1914?

Introduction

On 5 January 1914, progressive reformer Belle Case La Follette spoke to a primarily African-American audience in Washington, D.C., denouncing the ongoing efforts to segregate the races within federal offices and on the city's streetcars. Although she was white, La Follette made clear her qualifications to speak on the matter: "This business of being a woman is in many ways, like being a member of a despised race."[1] In the following months La Follette continued her series of magazine articles for women, attacking the segregation measures as damaging to Americans of all races. Those articles and their significance are explored in this web project.[2] Belle Case La Follette's crusade against segregation raises a variety of questions. La Follette clearly saw herself as a champion of African Americans, and yet in one column she referred to a woman as a "typical mammy" and children as "happy little coons." How can we reconcile such racist terms with La Follette's politics and personality? Why did she see the proposed segregation of
government offices and streetcars of Washington as a women's issue, and how did she present it as such to her female, predominantly white, readers? The documents included here reveal La Follette's perspectives on both race and gender, including woman's proper role in politics and in society and, more specifically, on her own role as wife of a U.S. senator.

Belle Case was born in Wisconsin in 1859 to farmers who placed a high value on education and gladly sacrificed to ensure that their only daughter could attend the University of Wisconsin. Although she struggled with shyness her entire lifetime, she excelled in public speaking. In her speech "Children's Playthings," delivered in her junior year, she denounced the romantic expectations socially imposed upon girls, who were encouraged to "dream ...dreams of impossible future happiness."[3] That same year she became engaged to fellow student Robert M. La Follette, who shared her interests in speech and reform. At her insistence, Belle Case taught school for two years before marrying La Follette in 1881 and the word "obey" was omitted from their marriage vows. While juggling marriage and motherhood, Belle La Follette became, in 1885, the first woman to graduate from the University of Wisconsin Law School. Rather than practice law, however, she channeled many of her political and social reform energies into her husband's political career.

Robert M. La Follette served as a Congressman from 1885 to 1891, Wisconsin governor from 1901 to 1906, and U.S. Senator from 1906 until his death in 1925.[4] "Fighting Bob" La Follette sought to bring the "Wisconsin Idea" of a truer democracy to the entire nation. He embraced a broad spectrum of reforms, including state regulatory commissions, the direct election of senators, the conservation of natural resources, and the concept of a university working in tandem with the legislature to create a modern service state. He was a major player on the national scene for decades. Unlike many men of his time, Bob La Follette depended enormously on his wife's advice (he called her "my wisest and best counselor"), seeking her opinions eagerly and often, openly acknowledging to fellow politicians that he would make no key decision without consulting his wife (see Image 3). The La Follettes could and did differ, even publicly, over political issues, but even at such times Bob would carefully consider Belle's perspective. They always remained in agreement over what lay at the heart of progressivism: "The supreme issue ... is the encroachment of the powerful few upon the rights of the many."[5] Despite her keen instinct for public policy and heartfelt dedication to social reform, during the first half of their forty-three year marriage, Belle La Follette seemed to have wholly internalized the prescribed sphere of "true womanhood," writing to her husband, "Whenever I get discouraged I always think there is nothing I would rather be than your wife and the mother of your children and I have no ambition except to contribute to your happiness and theirs and to your success and theirs."[6] But as she approached middle age at the turn of the century, and as nineteenth-century prescriptions for women's behavior gave way to more modern ideals, La Follette increasingly dedicated herself to causes about which she felt passionate. She began to advocate women's full participation in society, urging wives, through her women's column, to free themselves from their parasitic dependence upon their husbands, develop their talents, and be of service to humanity.[7]

In 1911 Belle La Follette wrote "What it Means to be an Insurgent Senator's Wife" for a women's magazine, detailing her activities and goals as a political spouse (see Document 2). She addressed hundreds of articles to women over a period of more than fifty years, primarily for the family organ La Follette's Magazine, which premiered as a weekly in 1909 and is still published monthly as The Progressive. Her work for the "Home and Education" department of La Follette's Magazine was hailed as "A New Kind of Women's Page" (see Document 18). The department's motto was "The Home is the real seat of government and the Wise men of all nations bring their gifts to the cradle." Belle Case La Follette spoke and wrote avidly in support of several causes, including world disarmament, civil rights, and women's rights.[8] She is probably best known for her dedication to attaining the woman's vote (see http://www.library.wisc.edu/etext/WIReader/Images/WER1367.html). In 1913 she was part of a contingent led by Dr. Anna Shaw that called upon the White House to urge President Woodrow Wilson to use his power to promote a women's suffrage amendment (see Document 13). Despite her special passion
for women's suffrage, all three of the causes she held most dear were, in her view, inextricably bound together.

La Follette was well aware that African-American women suffered racial as well as sexist oppression. African-American women were, for example, routinely denied even those few opportunities in education and employment open to white women, relegated instead to positions as farm laborers or domestic servants. African-American women suffered higher rates of miscarriage, still births, and infant mortality than did white women.\[9\] La Follette believed that white women had an obligation to combat racial discrimination, despite their inability to vote.\[10\] In 1911 she wrote a tribute to the many societal contributions made by the *Colored Folk of Washington* [see Document 1], in which she none too subtly chided white women in the nation's capital for their racist attitudes toward their African American domestic servants.

The La Follettes lived in Washington, D.C., home to the nation's largest urban African-American population, a population that, despite ongoing racial oppression, enjoyed elevated social status when compared to African Americans in other southern cities. This status horrified many white Americans, who sometimes protested directly to the president (see Document 5). On at least one occasion, President Woodrow Wilson responded soothingly that a segregation plan had already been put into motion (see Document 6). In April 1913, Wilson's cabinet began implementing the racial segregation of federal government offices, a series of actions supported by the National Democratic Fair Play Association, in which several southern senators were members.\[11\] African-American leader Booker T. Washington called the Association "one of the most hurtful and harmful organizations in Washington," which he believed was "constantly seeking to stir up strife between the races." He also reported that he had never seen the city's African-American population "so discouraged and bitter as they are at the present time."\[12\] The new segregation efforts clearly threatened even the modest gains made by Washington's African Americans. Yet when Oswald Garrison Villard, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), confronted Wilson on the issue (see Document 3), the president replied that segregation benefited African Americans, as it removed any potential for racial friction (see Document 4). Other segregation opponents, including Robert N. Wood, President of the United Colored Democracy of New York, wrote to Wilson of their fears that such efforts were only the beginning of a program of institutionalized racism to be implemented nationwide, which would culminate, in Wood's words, in the "re-enslavement of the colored citizens of this country" (see Document 7).\[13\]

Belle La Follette channeled her outrage over the federal government's sponsoring of increased segregation into attempts to influence public opinion and generate protest, particularly among women. In her column "The Color Line" (see Document 8), she outlined the negative effects of segregation on both races. She denounced segregationists, arguing that their actions violated principles of democracy, and she praised African Americans for their positive contributions to society. La Follette's personal investigation into the impact of this sudden segregation on two African-American women, long-time employees of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, added a human dimension to La Follette's column, designed to engender an empathetic response in female readers.\[14\]

Reaction to La Follette's "Color Line" column was swift. *La Follette's Magazine* had a circulation of 30,000 to 40,000, with about half its subscribers in Wisconsin. Presumably subscribers felt sympathetic to the family's progressive views on most issues, but La Follette's anti-segregationist opinions provoked a fair amount of outrage reflected in her 13 September 1913 column, "The Adverse Point of View on 'The Color Line.'" In the column La Follette defended herself against charges of ignorance and naiveté, reiterating her belief that civil service positions should be awarded purely on the basis of merit. In a pointed reference to the many white women who employed African-American women as domestic servants, she noted that only racial prejudice "should make us object to sitting next [to] the people on the street cars who are so intimately associated with all the work in the family" (see Document 9). La Follette followed up on the issue in her column the next week, urging her Washington female readers in particular to consider how an "absence of purpose that characterizes the social life of the national Capital reacts unfavorably on the
country," reminding them that they were "not supposed to belong to the butterfly and parasitic class," but "should represent the earnest, intelligent womanhood of the nation."[15]

That same month, at the request of Oswald Garrison Villard, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), May Childs Nerney, the organization's secretary, carried out an extensive investigation into the impact of the new enforcement of segregation in Washington.[16] In her report, which Villard sent in its entirety to Woodrow Wilson, Nerney specifically cited La Follette's columns as evidence to bolster the indictment of the new policies. In turn, La Follette published large sections of Nerney's report in *La Follette's Magazine* under the headline "Segregation in the Civil Service" (see Document 12). In her introduction to the report, La Follette continued to present segregation as a matter of special concern for her female readers, identifying prominent white women anti-segregationists as well as pointing out special hardships that African-American women faced as a result of the new policies. She also gave the pointed title "A Mother's Question" (see Document 15) to her column reprinting a letter from an American in Paris, "where there is no race discrimination," written by "a refined, intelligent colored woman" who predicted racial war if the United States continued on its current path of discrimination, even as she expressed her gratitude to La Follette for her "splendid articles" decrying segregation.

Other activists joined Belle La Follette after she pioneered the crusade to publicize and combat Washington's new era of segregation. Almost three months after the publication of La Follette's first "Color Line" column, a contingent of African-American men, led by William Monroe Trotter, editor of the Boston *Guardian*, traveled to the White House to present President Wilson with a petition signed by African Americans representing thirty-eight states, protesting the new segregation and urging its abolition (see Document 11). Trotter's detailed explanation of the significance African Americans attached to segregation is in stark contrast to Wilson's argument that the new policies were not significant, although he promised to look into the situation. Wilson, who had campaigned on the promise of fair and equal treatment for all, denied the injustice inherent in his administration's actions, reiterating his belief that racial segregation had been carried out "in the genuine desire to serve the convenience and agreeable feelings of everyone concerned."[17]

The African-American community appreciated La Follette's efforts to reverse the Wilson administration's segregationist policies. She accepted an invitation from the Young Men's Christian Association to speak on the subject of segregation to a primarily African-American audience, and was a banquet speaker at the New York meeting of the NAACP. Those speeches, widely reported by the nation's press, generated a new flood of responses ranging from an account by a "prominent" African-American woman of the tremendous swell of gratitude from within the African-American community, whose members were clearly heartened by La Follette's protest, to disgust and outrage from self-avowed segregationists (see Document 16). La Follette's "Color Line to Date" column included a description of her efforts to arrange a meeting between Rosebud A. Murraye, the government employee who was fired after granting La Follette an interview, and President Wilson himself. In a subsequent column "The Color Line: Various Points of View," La Follette continued to showcase the responses her columns and speeches had generated nationwide (see Document 17).

William Monroe Trotter also refused to let the issue die. One year after their initial conversation, a passionate Trotter again confronted President Wilson with the evidence of the administration's continuing promotion of segregation and asked that the policy be reversed (see Document 19). When Trotter dismissed Wilson's defense of segregation as the best method to avoid racial "friction," Wilson lost his temper (which he privately admitted he regretted almost immediately) and abruptly ended the meeting. Papers across the nation, including the *New York Times*, carried on their front pages stories of Wilson's defensiveness and Trotter's ejection from the White House (see Document 20). In the firestorm of bad publicity, the *New Republic* scorned Wilson for his "inaction in a moral crisis" (see Document 22), and *The Nation* called segregation "a sad blot upon the Wilson Administration" (see Document 21). Belle La Follette also used the incident to once again press her point. In "Segregation in the Civil Service" she asked pointedly, "What becomes of the fundamental principles of our institutions if the color line or any other arbitrary line can be drawn by the government among its civil service employees?" (see Document 23).
It is difficult to assess the exact impact of Belle La Follette's columns. Several things are certain, however. Black and white advocates of civil rights refused to acquiesce to the giant step backward, swelling the ranks of the Washington NAACP from the original 143 including Belle Case La Follette) to 700 dues-paying members. The President received letters protesting official policies of segregation from every state, written by blacks and whites, men and women (see Document 10). These communications included a telegram from the Northeastern Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, representing nearly 5,000 members, as well as "A Letter to the President," an editorial published in a Kentucky newspaper, the Lexington Herald, asserting that segregation at the federal level only encouraged white racists in the South to further deprive African Americans of their rights, and warning that successful segregation would be catastrophic not just for the South but for the entire nation.[18] This "rain of complaints" inspired by activists including La Follette forced an end to official federal segregation, prompting many victory celebrations within the offices of the NAACP even as activists continued to fight less formal segregation practices (see Document 14).[19]

Neither the federal government nor the nation at large, however, was rendered suddenly colorblind by the foundering of the administration's plan for segregation. Despite the reversal of official policies, unofficial segregation was still carried out and discriminatory hiring practices continued. The actions of La Follette, Trotter, and a host of other activists remain nonetheless important when contrasted with what might have been had they remained complacent: the formal institutionalization of racial segregation throughout the federal government, and possibly far beyond.

The women leaders in particular of the African-American community nationwide never forgot Belle La Follette's public stance on their behalf during what was called at the time "the most serious blow to Negro rights since the days of slavery."[20] Even in the midst of a disagreement with Belle La Follette over troop removal from Russia following World War I, Mary Church Terrell noted La Follette's total lack of race prejudice and praised her for always having the courage of her convictions. "[B]y word and by deed," she wrote, Belle La Follette strove to "place herself on record as being in favor of any legislation or any effort designed to give colored people all the rights and privileges which other people enjoy."[21] La Follette remained vigilant in her efforts to combat injustice. When her husband died in 1925, she became chief counsel to his successor, their son Robert, Jr. "Young Bob" La Follette depended upon his mother greatly during his early years as a senator, gradually becoming more confident and a powerful progressive in his own right, retaining his family's senate seat until his defeat by Joe McCarthy in 1946.[22]

In 1926 La Follette tackled the issue of "Segregation in Washington" once more (see Document 24). In a column remarkably similar in many ways to her 1911 "Colored Folk of Washington," La Follette again presented the African-American citizens of the nation's capital as industrious and enterprising, noting that despite ongoing segregation, in reality "thousands and thousands" of people of both races lived in close proximity to one another "without harm and for the most part quite unconsciously."

Upon her death in 1931, Belle Case La Follette was hailed by the New York Times as "perhaps the least known, yet the most influential of all the American women who have had to do with public affairs in this country."[23] The "new kind of women's page" she created within her family's magazine allowed her to establish a unique relationship with her readers. She challenged thousands of Americans, most of them women, to think deeply on the political, social, and economic ramifications of racism. She encouraged and enabled them to see an attack on one race as an attack on all. By publicly exposing the segregationist activities of the Wilson administration, she also showed by example how women, without the benefit of the vote and without economic power, could and did contribute to the battle against injustice. As they strove to empower African Americans, American women of all races who heeded La Follette's call empowered themselves by becoming engaged and influential citizens.

Introduction

Belle Case La Follette lived in Washington, D.C. between 1885 and 1891, and then again beginning in 1905. In this column for the family magazine, La Follette's Magazine, she detailed the evolution of Washington's African-American population and the history of race relations in the city. In her defense of African-American people against common racial stereotypes, La Follette challenged the judgmental attitudes of many white employers toward their black domestic servants. La Follette instead emphasized the contributions of African Americans to Washington D.C. and looked positively on the growth of Black business and culture in the city.
IN THESE DAYS of research and statistics one fears to venture an opinion not based on exact knowledge. Recently a fine type of New England woman, who remembers the Civil war as a part of her girlhood experience, was asking me about the colored people of Washington. When I had given her my impressions she urged me to put them in writing. The theme interests me and is one upon which my mind often dwells, and yet I can only speak of it from my own personal viewpoint.

We spent six years in Washington in the eighties—midway between the war and the present time. The race question was very much more in evidence then than now. The status of the negro was still a political issue. Often the rights or wrongs of black folks became the subject of heated discussion in Congress. There were two or three colored representatives in Congress from the Black Belt of the South. The Blair bill, providing national aid to education, was debated almost altogether as affecting our obligations to the colored race.

At that time the citizens of Washington were also very quick to take sides on the race question. There were always those to denounce and those to defend the “darkies”; those who said “nigger” and those who said “negroes,” with equal emphasis. It is significant that today nearly everyone says “colored” quite unconsciously. At that time whatever their viewpoint on the negro problem, while folks asserted it was up to the “superior” race to solve it. Not even the strongest champions considered the possibility of black folks settling it for themselves.

Quite naturally the negroes took little thought of their obligation. Only a generation from slavery, they were but beginning to adjust themselves to new conditions. There were among them many of the old type whose habits, manners, traditions, and example were wholesome. They were the strongest influences for good upon the new generation, who were, for the most part, inexperienced, little educated, and undisciplined; whose greatest longing, whose first ambition was to be like white folks. They did not realize that abolishing slavery had not removed the barriers of race and color; nor had they awakened to the possibilities of separate race development. They were often foolishly imitative, sometimes offensively assuming. I remember their crowded Sunday-afternoon promenades on Connecticut Avenue, sometimes incessant enough, were the subject of much humorous comment. There is nothing of that kind now.

With all their faults, I loved the colored folk then, as I do now. The elemental quality in their nature appeals to me. They had then, as now, few vices, ease of manner, and ingratiating kindness. Those years in Washington were inseparably associated with Maria, the faithful nurse, her mother, a typical mammy. John, the walker at the boarding-house, with his wide, good-natured smile, Margaret, the cook, with her marvelous wisdom and judgment, and the happy little cubs who played and danced in the street.

RETURNING to Washington after an absence of twenty years, we find a great change. The colored people now--

In These Days of Research and Statistics one fears to venture an opinion not based on exact knowledge. Recently a fine type of New England woman, who remembers the Civil war as a part of her girlhood experience, was asking me about the colored people of Washington. When I had given her my impressions she urged me to put them in writing. The theme interests me and is one upon which my mind often dwells, and yet I can only speak of it from my own personal viewpoint.
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RETURNING to Washington after an absence of twenty years, we find a great change. The colored people no longer appear to weigh on the conscience or the consciousness of their white brethren. Very little thought seems to be given to the race question, either public or personally.

Colored folk are presumed to settle their own problems and carry their own burden. And it seems to me it can be fairly said to their credit, they have not shirked, nor flinched, nor failed. They constitute one-third of the population of Washington. They perform nearly all of the manual labor of the city. They are wage-earners. They receive and spend a great deal of money. It is interesting to note the effect of their purchasing power on the trade. Quite lately I was in one of the best shoe stores in Washington, where a young colored woman was being waited on very courteously. A friend who accompanied me remarked that there were always colored people buying shoes in that store. This led me to observe that when the customer came to the desk to pay the bill, the clerk told her he would make a memorandum of the number of the shoes she had just purchased, so she could get them again if they pleased her evidently taking pains to hold her trade.

In Washington there is much complaint of the service of the colored people, and very little said in appreciation of it. When I hear employers finding nothing but fault, I wonder what Washington would do without the colored help. When women condemn the whole race, -- as women are wont to do, -- because of their hard experiences with servants, I think how much more fortunate households are here where there is always some help available, than in many parts of the country where there is none at all to be had. While the colored help does often lack reliability, much of it is very good. Married women stay in service, and this
lends a stable element that is unusual.

Our offhand average judgment of the negroes is apt to be thoughtlessly uncharitable. No allowance is made for their handicap, their disadvantages in opportunity and environment. There may be a class that warrants the charge of shiftlessness, but against that it should be remembered that there is a class of very wealthy and prosperous negroes. More significant than either of these extremes is the very notable tendency of the working people to save and buy homes.

A while ago I went to visit our cook, Anna. It took nearly an hour to reach her by street car, and as I made the tedious changes and wearisome waits. I reflected that all last winter while she had cooked for us, in good weather and bad, she had taken that long ride, night and morning, just to be at home. Easter Sunday her baby was born. The first of June she was with us again. An exception? Well, the hills all about are dotted with little homes like Anna's, and there are many new ones in process of building. Where the women do not go out to service, they take home washing and sewing. At the markets women sell flowers, vegetables, and eggs raised on these little places. To a certain extent these little homes reflect the spirit of the pioneer home-makers of this country, -- the sacrifices, the varied occupations, the industry, and the love of the land.

If you observe the children out at play as you pass the colored school, you cannot but be impressed with the neatness and taste of their dress, and their bright attractive faces. In these times of high cost of living, you wonder how it is done. I happen to know how one mother gets up early every morning, gives her children a good breakfast, and gets each one ready for school, before beginning her day at service.

Colored children are interesting, and often beautiful. Education and refinement are changing the expression and the features of the negro. They have naturally good physique, good poise, and good manners. As I observe them on the street in the cars, and in our homes, I wonder if, considering all the circumstance, there is a class of people more deserving of a word of appreciation than the colored folk of Washington.

As a generalization, I would say that they consciously or intuitively recognize the color barrier; that they accept their place at the foot of the economic ladder; that they are availing themselves of the opportunity to develop as a separate race. They have their own standards to emulate, and naturally follow the line of least resistance. As they learn from experience the shortest road to advancement and achievement they care less to imitate white people, or to be allied with them socially. Indeed, it is said there is a good colored theater in Washington where it is the white people who are not welcomed. There are also some fine business blocks exclusively for colored patronage.

As children suddenly coming to maturity are sobered by the responsibility of life, so the colored folk have lost some of that quality that Mr. G. Stanley Hall, the philosopher,[A] calls "euphoria," -- the joy of living. It seems to me that almost every thoughtful black face carries its shadows of sorrow, but it is hardly ever too deep for a bright smile to break through. The long ages of hot sunlight darkened their skin, but it seems to have implanted deep into their nature an inner warmth and glow, -- a magnetism and hold upon the elemental life as different from ours as arctic ice from the Gulf Stream.

A. G. Stanley Hall (1844-1924) was the founder of modern psychology and pioneered the study of child psychology.

**Introduction**

This story, written for a popular women's magazine, detailed the demanding schedule of a political wife. It also revealed some of Belle La Follette's impatience with politicians' wives, who felt so fearful of negatively affecting their husbands' careers that they seldom formulated their own opinions, even on trivial matters.

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**WHAT IT MEANS**

To Be An Insurgent Senator's Wife
BY MRS. ROBERT M. LA FOLLETTE
Wife of the Senior Senator from Wisconsin

**EDITOR'S NOTE --** We asked Mrs. La Follette "What does it mean to be the wife of an Insurgent Senator?" And she has answered the question. No other woman in America is better fitted to answer it, for she has witnessed the struggle of politics in every phase, from bottom to top. From the day when her husband won the District Attorneyship, soon after his graduation from college, defeating the local machine, their life has been a battle. In it there has been all the adventure and thrill of the best story. And added to that the satisfaction that comes with success hard won and service rendered.

WHEN we came to Washington in '85, Mr. La Follette was the youngest member. I was very proud of the fact. We had graduated from our State university only five years before he was elected, and were quite inexperienced.

Newspaper reporters poke fun at the new Congressman, and would make you believe that however great a man he is at home he amounts to little in Washington. The wise woman with whom we boarded in those early days was nearer the truth. She said a Congressman is always "somebody in particular" -- and surely his wife is.

Without any other introduction the new Congressman's wife has the official privilege -- indeed the official obligation -- to call on the wives of social representatives of all the members of Congress older than her husband in service, and of the Senate, Cabinet, Supreme Court, diplomatic corps, and the lady of the White House. The President's wife does not return visits, and some of the Cabinet ladies return their calls by card. But the others are expected to return in person. Thus the new Congressman's wife may enter the social whirl to any extent she chooses. She seldom undertakes to cover all the ground the first season. But some go at it as they would at a housecleaning, and it is not a bad idea, either.

It sounds like a tremendous undertaking, but the days and hours of calling are fixed, and the social program all made up. The newcomer may be a little dazed the first day by the new names and faces and streets. But she meets the same women over and over the same day and succeeding days; there is easy freedom of introduction and rapid acquaintance. Before the week is over she has perhaps made more calls than ever before in all her life. On Mondays (Judiciary Day), and Wednesdays (Cabinet Day), she will not make a big record; and perhaps not more than twenty-five or thirty on Thursdays (Senators Day). But on Tuesdays, generally kept by the wives of Representatives, it will make her friends at home gasp when she writes them how many calls she made in one day. Perhaps thirty or forty members of Congress will be in one hotel, and their wives keep the day together. Lights, music, decorations, clothes, give these formal afternoon occasions the air of an evening reception. But it need not take over half an hour to go down one of the long lines, and if one goes to a number of these hotels she can dispose of a hundred cards -- the new Congressman's wife never starts out with enough. Before the week is over she may have a larger calling list than she has ever had at home, and it is with the great names of the present day political history of the
In those days a Congressman did not have a clerk, as now. I helped with the departmental correspondence, and sent out all the garden seeds and speeches and public documents that were assigned for distribution. In that way I became familiar with the names and addresses on the mailing list. So I was able when I accompanied Mr. La Follette on his campaigns through his Congressional district to sometimes jog even his excellent memory with a hint as to "who was who."

The frequent recurring elections are a sore trial to a member of the House of Representatives. He hardly has time to enjoy the relief of one election before another campaign is on his hands. His family shares the strain. I certainly thought "republics ungrateful" when, after six years of what I believed to be most devoted public service, Mr. La Follette came home one election night and said the State of Wisconsin had gone Democratic, and that his opponent was elected to Congress. The "stay-at-home" vote in our own county alone would have changed the result. But he never blamed his constituency or lost faith in the people. When our little daughter heard some one say her papa would have to practice law, she anxiously inquired: "Mamma, do lawyers have to be elected?"

It was sixteen years from the time I left Washington until I returned again the wife of the "Lonely Man of the Senate." I did not expect to be received with open arms, and was not. I made the calls a new Senator's wife should make; some were returned and some were not. . . .

Seventeen Senators had been in the House or Senate twenty years earlier. My impression on meeting the women I had known in that earlier period was that Washington life deals very kindly with women. The assured position, social contact, becoming dress, transforms many a plain-looking, timid woman into a handsome social leader, at ease with all the world. . . .

Often I am asked what a Senator does, and what is a typical day for a Senator's wife. Like other people's work nowadays, it does not take long to tell the program, but it calls for a large expenditure of nervous energy. The Senator works late at night. This makes breakfast a long meal. The children must have theirs in time for school, and the mother has breakfast with them. While she waits for the rest of the family she reads the papers, plans the meals, does the ordering. She always has many letters to write, and if she does not have a newspaper interview or morning call, tries to get some done before luncheon. In the afternoon she makes or receives calls. In the evening she has friends to dinner. Those who are in society go to receptions, theaters, or something every evening.

The Senate does not usually convene until twelve o'clock, but the committee meetings are at ten. A Senator leaves his home soon after he has had his breakfast and examined his mail. He is likely to be so interrupted by callers during the day that even if he is not occupied with the Senate proceedings he has no time for work. So after dinner he begins his study and seldom gets to bed earlier than twelve or one o'clock.

The cost of living in Washington is probably not very much higher, if any, for permanent residents than it is in other cities. But the change twice a year and the general temporariness of our stay make it more expensive. Official life has so many "incidental" demands on the purse that the usual important items -- shelter, food, and clothing, become "incidental." Although we live very modestly according to Washington standards, we cannot keep house and live within the salary.

"What do Washington women talk about?" I am asked. Altogether too much about the weather. Women in official life come from all parts of the country, have widely varied experience as well as much in common. They are intelligent, and have insight. They might discuss current events, politics, religion, education, philosophy.

But there is nothing of the French salon or English drawing-room in the social life of Washington. I often wonder why. Women appear fearful their opinions will be interpreted as an echo of their husband's. You often hear them say, even in trivial matters, where it could really make no difference, "I speak for myself," or "This is my own, not my husband's view."
Yet the official life has its fascination. The constant change in personnel, some going, others coming, while a bar to deep friendships, keeps up the interest in just meeting people.

An exceeding graciousness and desire to please pervades every function. Sometimes the bitter feeling in politics is reflected in the social life. I have myself felt it, but not often.

What are the satisfactions of public life? What are its sorrows? For the public official who is anxious to serve the public his satisfaction is in what he accomplishes. Contending with so many elements beyond his control, progress is slow, and he must be patient and far-seeing, and have never-failing faith in the ultimate result of his efforts, if he would get the reward men feel in work over which they have gained complete mastery....

Washington life is an unsettled existence. When here we think about home. And when home, we think we must soon be going to Washington. Children do not like Washington. They leave home reluctantly and long to get back. The father's absorption in politics and mother's social obligations make the home atmosphere rather exciting for the children who are interested, and dreary for those who are not. Then there is always the children's school problem.

The woman whose husband is in politics must, more than any other, learn to value the things that are worth while, the love and companionship of her family, health, out-of-doors, and simple joys. If she sets her heart on some ambition -- his political success or her social supremacy -- she is building on uncertainties. More than any other life, politics is full of the unexpected -- now success, now disappointment. One cannot foretell and must always be prepared for what comes. It is a life of strain, with few breathing places, and one must have an inner calm if she would be the mate of an Insurgent.

Introduction

Oswald Garrison Villard, the white Chairman of the Executive Committee of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and President Woodrow Wilson maintained a lengthy correspondence about increasingly segregationist policies in the Capital. In this early letter, note the many different tactics ranging from flattery to threats of political reprisals that Villard utilized in his effort to persuade Wilson to speak publicly against segregation.

PERSONAL
Dear President Wilson:

New York July 21, 1913.

A number of protests, of which the enclosed are samples, are pouring upon me in my capacity of Chairman of the Executive Committee of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The colored people everywhere are greatly stirred up over what they consider the hostile attitude of the Administration in regard to colored employees in the government departments. In the Bureau of Engraving and Printing colored people have been segregated at their work where colored and white were together before. General Burt touches upon the segregation in the Treasury Department. In the Bureau of the Census and the Post Office Department segregation is going on steadily. Some of this segregation works great hardship upon the colored clerks. The ruling of the Treasury Department upon which General Burt touches is particularly humiliating to them because it seems to imply that there is something degrading and demoralizing in associating with these American citizens, as if they were lepers to be set apart.

Before taking action, or permitting the Association to take action officially, in regard to these matters I think it but fair and just to you to ask for some authoritative expression from you as to whether this policy is a deliberate one on the part of the Administration, or whether it is due, as I believe, to the individual initiative of department heads without your knowledge and consent.

I cannot exaggerate the effect this has had upon the colored people at large. The colored press, which is mostly Republican harps upon it in every issue; I enclose a sample from the most influential New York newspaper. The *Crisis*, the organ of our Association, has the largest circulation ever attained among colored people. I enclose herewith its editorial in support of you last fall; its readers are now asking whether it means to keep silent in the face of these discriminations at Washington at the hands of men it helped to put in office. The colored men who voted and worked for you in the belief that their status as American citizens was safe in your hands are deeply cast down, and know not how to answer the criticisms they receive on every hand. Should this policy be continued we should lose all that we gained in the last campaign in splitting the negro vote, and in teaching a part of the race to vote nationally and not with regard to their own immediate interest, or appeals to the issues of the war.

You have, as first Southern-born President of the United States since the war, a wonderful opportunity to win the confidence and interest of these people who ask nothing [but] fair play,—nothing but what they are entitled to under the Constitution. They followed your speeches in the campaign with thrilled interest; they got from your "New Freedom" the belief that your democracy was not limited by race or color; that the fundamental scientific political truths which you have therein expressed, being truths, applied to every human being whatever his situation, whatever his color.[B] If they are wrong in this their will be the severest disappointment which has come to them during the fifty years of freedom in which they have been loyal patriotic citizens; during which they have added enormously to the wealth of the country, although
starting with nothing but the clothes they wore when the shackles fell from their scarred limbs.

As one who has supported you in season and out, at Princeton, at Trenton and in Washington, you will appreciate my own great embarrassment in this situation; it is, I feel sure, not too much to ask that you will let me know just how the Administration stands in relation to the colored man that I may be instrumental in putting the facts in the case before the colored people.

Sincerely yours, Oswald Garrison Villard.

A. Among Villard's many enclosures was a letter from retired brigadier general Andrew Sheridan Burt detailing the negative impact of segregation in the Treasury Department, particularly the order that segregated toilet facilities.

B. Wilson's proposed "New Freedom" hinged on his belief that the federal government should sweep away all special privileges and artificial barriers, and to promote instead individual development, and restore free and open competition.

C. Before becoming president of the United States, Wilson had served as president of Princeton University and governor of New Jersey, whose capital is Trenton.

Introduction

In his reply to Villard, Wilson defended segregation as being in the best interest of African Americans, and criticized Villard and other protestors for their inability to recognize what he viewed as segregation's positive qualities.

The White House July 23, 1913

My dear Mr. Villard:

Your letter of July first, I must say, distresses me. It is true that the segregation of the colored employees in the several departments was begun upon the initiative and at the suggestion of several of the heads of departments, but as much in the interest of the negroes as for any other reason, with the approval of some of the most influential negroes I know, and with the idea that the friction, or rather the discontent and uneasiness, which had prevailed in many of the departments would thereby be removed. It is as far as possible from being a movement against the negroes. I sincerely believe it to be in their interest. And what distresses me about your letter is to find that you look at it in so different a light.

I am sorry that those who interest themselves most in the welfare of the negroes should misjudge this action on the part of the departments, for they are seriously misjudging it. My own feeling is, by putting certain bureaus and sections of the service in the charge of negroes we are rendering them more safe in their possession of office and less likely to be discriminated against.

Cordially and sincerely yours, Woodrow Wilson

**Introduction**

This letter sent by Thomas Dixon, Jr. (1864-1946), a writer from North Carolina who attacked racial equality, to President Wilson, a native of Virginia, revealed the expectation among many white racists that the President would work to turn back any progress made towards integration made by his predecessors. Dixon subtly threatened Wilson with the specter of serious political consequences if he did not. (For more on Thomas Dixon, Jr., see [http://docsouth.unc.edu/dixonclan/bio.html](http://docsouth.unc.edu/dixonclan/bio.html).)

New York July 27 [1913].

Dear Mr. President:

I am heartsick over the announcement that you have appointed a Negro to boss white girls as Register of the Treasury. Please let me as one of your best friends utter my passionate protest. Unless you can withdraw his name the South can never forgive this.

We have travelled many leagues from the Negro Equality ideas in vogue when Cleveland, a Democratic President did this thing. The establishment of Negro men over white women employees of the Treasury Dept, has in the minds of many thoughtful men & women long been a serious offense against the cleanliness of our social life. I have confidently hoped that you would purge Washington of this iniquity.

I sincerely hope you can withdraw the appointment.

Sincerely, Thomas Dixon

I have no axe to grind. I am only a citizen & your friend.

Introduction

In his reply to Thomas Dixon (see Document 5), Wilson rather testily offered his assurance that he understood and sympathized with segregationists, but that he must promote his image as an altruistic national leader, not a racist.

July 29, 1913

My dear Dixon.

I do not think you know what is going on down here. We are handling the force of the colored people who are now in the departments in just the way in which they ought to be handled. We are trying -- and by degrees succeeding -- a plan of concentration which will put them all together and will not in any one bureau mix the two races. This change has already practically been effected in the bureau in which I proposed the appointment of Patterson.[A]

It would not be right for me to look at this matter in any other way than as the leader of a great national party. I am trying to handle these matters with the best judgment but in the spirit of the whole country, though with entire comprehension of the considerations which certainly do not need to be pointed out to me.

Cordially and sincerely yours. Woodrow Wilson

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A. The African-American man promoted to Register of the Treasury.

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Introduction

This passionate letter from Robert N. Wood, an African-American printer who served as President of the United Colored Democracy of the State of New York from 1912 until his death in 1915, confronted Wilson squarely with the frustration and anger experienced by millions of African Americans facing the injustice of segregation. Among his many arguments, Wood, like Belle La Follette, noted that racial mixing had always been a fixture in American society. Despite Wood's eloquence, Wilson never answered the letter.

New York August 5, 1913

Mr. President, Sir:

On behalf of the United Colored Democracy as a political organization and in order to voice the feeling and thought of the ten million persons of Negro blood who justly aspire to the maintenance of their privileges as citizens in this great democracy, I am reluctantly compelled to express to you a respectful, but none the less earnest, protest at the course your administration is pursuing with regard to the status of the colored people of this country.

In taking this step I have in mind the fact that never, perhaps, since the first term of Abraham Lincoln has a President of the United States found himself obliged to face, immediately after his inauguration, questions of such momentous importance as have successively occupied your attention since the Fourth of March, last. But while the Tariff, the California Alien Land Laws, the Mexican Government, the compensation of the family of an Italian who was lynched in Florida are certainly matters deserving of the consideration of the Chief Executive of the Nation, I feel that no question can be of more urgent concern to you than the future of ten million citizens within the borders of the United States. The apparent complacency which has marked the attitude of the colored people towards the campaign for their reduction to serfdom which certain reactionary elements in the Democratic Party have inaugurated coincidentally with your assumption of the Presidency cannot by any means be regarded as an indication of our satisfaction with the movement to place us in the condition which was ours before the Civil War. Your scholarly training and your breadth of observation have made you cognizant of the wonderful change that has taken place in the condition of the colored people in this country during the past fifty years. Your clear perception of the importance of this progressive element in the American population has led you to express your determination not to allow any act of wanton injustice or retrograde legislation to be aimed at us during your tenure of office. Knowing and believing, as I do, that you are a man of courage, and mindful of your own personal assurance to me that you are a Christian and a gentleman, I feel that I can no longer disregard the insistent demands of those of my race who expressed their confidence in you by casting their vote to help secure your elevation to the Chief Magistracy, as well as of those whose fears for the safety of our citizenship under a Democratic Administration now seem only too well to have been justified, that I appeal to you for some expression by word or deed that will discourage and discountenance the enemies of the colored man at Washington.

You are not, perhaps, aware that the colored men whose intelligent grasp of the facts of history led them to abandon the superstitious reverence for the Republican Party which has characterized our race are among the leaders of thought in their communities. To me, who can claim the record of having voted none but the Democratic ticket for the last sixteen years, the satisfaction of our triumph in last year's election is all the keener with the appreciation of the difficulties which we have had to face in removing from the mind of the colored voters the insidious prejudice and dread of the Southern Democrat. But at last we induced them to meet the Southerner half-way, assuring them that between honorable and deserving participation in the rights and duties of American citizenship on the one hand and subjection to the yoke of the untraveled,
provincial, self-seeking politician from the South on the other hand, there stood in the person of Woodrow Wilson a man of Southern birth whose purpose was to unite the country in the bonds of good-will and mutual respect and whose comprehensive insight had taught him that the country could never be united except the colored people were considered part thereof.

As a man of Southern birth you are well aware, Mr. President, that the attitude of the best teacher in the South toward the colored population is not the attitude represented by those persons in and out of Congress whose sole aim in life seems to be the suppression of the just aspirations of colored people, after centuries of residence in this country, to the maintenance of "the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" in this land, so rich in opportunity to the most degraded refuse of Europe. But even if the sentiment of the Southern people were really represented by men like Vardaman,[A] the Senator from Mississippi who proudly boasts of having murdered a white man in cold blood, and Heflin[B] the Representative from Alabama who declared that another Czolgosz[C] should have attached a time fuse to a bomb and placed it under the table from which the then President of the United States partook of a sandwich with the most useful resident of Alabama[D], you would not therefore be justified in disregarding the feeling of the colored people under the treatment which has been accorded to them. As Chief Magistrate you cannot refuse to hear our side of the case, even if your own personal sympathies should lean rather toward the other.

The colored people deeply resent the segregation of clerks in the Civil Service at Washington, in the Post Office and in other departments of the Federal Government. We resent it, not at all because we are particularly anxious to eat in the same room or use the same soap and towels that white people use, but because we see in the separation of the races in the matter of soup and soap the beginning of a movement to deprive the colored man entirely of soup and soap, to eliminate him wholly from the Civil Service of the United States. For just as soon as there is a lunchroom or a work-room which the colored man may not enter in a government building, there will be separate tasks assigned the colored men and these will be, as the promoters of segregation have declared, the tasks which white men do not want. Intelligence and efficiency cannot now be measured according to the color of the skin. In past administrations individual colored clerks of superior training and ability have been held back to permit of the promotion of white men of inferior attainments. In such cases there was always recourse to the proper authorities and the victim of such discrimination could thus attain redress. But the present system of segregation is surely tending toward the total elimination of colored people from honest employment in the Civil Service of the United States. We see no reason why the status quo of the past fifty years cannot be maintained without depriving white Civil Service employees of the fullest opportunity for advancement according to their merits.

We protest against segregation because our interests are at stake. We protest against it none the less because of the absurd inadequacy of the reasons given for the change in the departmental service. As a Southern man you well know, Mr. President, that it is no more a crime for a colored adult to eat a meal in the same room with a white adult than it is a heinous offense for a white person to eat a meal prepared by a colored person or drawn from the bosom and blood of a colored woman. No white man was ever degraded by the fact that a colored woman performed for him a duty and a service hardly less sacred than that of motherhood itself. No white man will ever be degraded by the fact that a person perhaps just as white as himself, but called black, eats in the same room with him. Finally, Mr. President, as American citizens sincerely interested in the welfare of the country as a whole, we resent the segregation and the discrimination in the Federal Civil Service because, however necessary and important the enforced separation of the races may be to the voters in rural communities in Alabama or Mississippi and to their candidates for office, it is not a business in which this great nation can engage with any profit to the people as a whole, and it can be productive only of evil and ill will among a large and important minority.

In asking you in some way to express your disapproval of the repressive and reactionary measures taken against the colored people, we do not expect you, Mr. President, to do anything beyond your authority or out of keeping with your sense of justice. If some innocent colored man should be pulled off a train and lynched -- a fate which a traveling secretary of the Y.M.C.A., barely escaped two years ago in a village in Georgia -- we should not consider it your duty to ask Congress to provide an appropriation for the relief of his family. For maintaining a dignified silence you would have ample precedent in the case of the six
farmers in Florida who were murdered by a mob because one of them had been accused of killing a white man in self-defense. The *Spectator*, of London, and other influential foreign papers think that you could render no greater service and to civilization than in taking action looking toward the suppression of lynching. As an American citizen and a Democrat, I do not expect you to achieve so signal a triumph against the forces that make for the degradation of white people far more than of colored people, for I know the limitations placed upon you by the Constitution of the United States, by the Democratic Doctrine of States' Rights, and by the complacency of your Republic and [Republican] predecessors. But I do know that it is within your power to impress upon the reactionary elements within the Democratic Party, and especially at the seat of the Federal Government, that you will not be a party to any action leading to the re-enslavement of the colored citizens of this country.

I am, Mr. President,

Very respectfully yours,       Robert N. Wood

For the United Colored Democracy and the Colored People of the United States.

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A. James K. Vardaman (1861--1930) was an openly racist Senator from Mississippi who served from 1912 to 1918.

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B. James T. Heflin (1869--1951) served as a Democratic Representative from Alabama from 1904 to 1920 and as a Senator from 1920 to 1931.

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C. Anarchist Leon Franz Czolgosz assassinated President William McKinley in September 1901.

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D. Wood is referring to President Theodore Roosevelt's dinner with African-American leader Booker T. Washington on 16 October 1901.

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**Introduction**

This powerful document reveals some of Belle La Follette's outrage at the new steps toward segregation that swept Washington, D.C. after Wilson's election. La Follette herself, as described below, had launched an investigation into the segregation of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, an effort that seemed to result in at least one African-American woman losing her job.

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*The Color Line*

IN OUR issue of August 5, 1911, I wrote what might be called an appreciation of the progress of the colored people in the District of Colombia from the standpoint of a casual observer over a period of twenty or more years. That article cost us subscribers and called forth letters of bitter denunciation. While it is not my purpose needlessly to offend any reader, it seems to me the very essence of editorial obligation to stand firmly for well grounded convictions on important questions, especially when human rights are involved.

Outside of Washington I claim no personal knowledge of the "race question;" nor do I profess to speak of it here at the capital with the authority of an expert investigator. But I do feel warranted in saying that considering their opportunities the negroes of Washington have done well in the last quarter of a century and that they constitute a useful, well behaved and in general, a worthy citizenship. There are exceptional cases of unspeakable brutality and outrage, but to judge all the race by these exceptions is as unjust as to brand all white men as Diggesses, Caminettis, and Charltons.[A]

According to my observation, the race question has been taking very good care of itself here in Washington. Segregation in the schools and in most of the churches, except the Catholic -- where I observe the colored people are admitted to worship -- has been accepted. In most public places, theaters, hotels, and all sorts of gatherings, the color line is drawn as if by mutual consent. The colored people themselves seem disinclined to raise the issue. While the District of Columbia Suffrage League specifically state that their movement discriminates against neither sex nor race, the color issue has been avoided at the Woman Suffrage Headquarters.

Heretofore, in the street cars, and, as I understand it, in the government service there has been no official discrimination against the colored people.

Since the advent of the new administration, however, there has been unquestionably a marked change, not perhaps so much in sentiment, as in the freer, stronger expression of the determination to impose upon the District of Columbia the usages of the southern states in the matter of race segregation. Three bills have been introduced this session of Congress for segregation of the races in street cars of Washington by Mr. Clark of Florida, Mr. Harrison of Mississippi, and Mr. Thompson of Oklahoma.

There has been talk before this of Jim Crow cars here, but it has been only talk. Very few have really believed that a movement for segregation of the races in the street cars could be made to carry at the capital of the nation. But now the possibility is being regarded more seriously.

There is no just reason for asking segregation on the street cars of Washington, other than race prejudice. The colored people are, according to their employment, as clean and orderly as you could expect them to be. Segregation on the street cars has no more foundation in right than segregation of pedestrians on the highway. It seems strange that the very ones who consider it the greatest hardship to sit next a colored person in a street car, entrust their children to colored nurses and eat food prepared by colored hands.
THE COURTLY, philosophical Senator Newlands has long been an exponent of the idea that the colored people should be returned to Africa. But there has been no sting in his suggestion. Indeed it took no hold upon the public thought. It was only a theory. Quite different is the effect of speeches of men like Senator Vardaman and Representative Heflin advocating with Southern vehemence the suppression of all opportunity for growth and advancement of the colored citizens of the United States. Such an announcement as follows, especially when it is without provocation, is a proclamation of hate and strikes terror to the hearts of the colored race.

**SHALL THE NEGRO RULE?**

ALL OTHER QUESTIONS ARE MINIMIZED UNDER THE SHADOW OF SOCIAL EQUALITY AND PREFERENCE FOR NEGROES IN THE EMPLOY OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES

SENATOR JAMES K. VARDAMAN AND OTHER PROMINENT SPEAKERS WILL ADDRESS THE PEOPLE AT A PUBLIC MEETING TO BE HELD UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FAIR PLAY ASSOCIATION WHICH STANDS FOR SEGREGATION OF THE RACES IN GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT, AND "REORGANIZATION OF THE CIVIL SERVICE" AS DECLARED FOR IN THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC PLATFORM OF 1912. AT THIS MEETING THE POLICY OF APPOINTING NEGROES TO GOVERNMENT POSITIONS WILL BE FULLY AND FREELY DISCUSSED AT OLD MASONIC TEMPLE, COR. 9TH AND F STS. N. W.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

WEDNESDAY NIGHT, AUGUST 6, 1913

ADMIT BEARER

AT 8 O'CLOCK

In our homes and on the streets we hear snatches of conversation that bespeak the fear and suffering caused by this new agitation. My cook asks me: "Is it true they can send us to Africa?"

"What do I know of Africa?" she says, with choking voice. "I was born here. I have always lived here; and I wants to die here."

With all the traditions of a race but fifty years from slavery, -- indeed with no other tradition -- with high officials, leaders of the party in power, talking of deportation, is it any wonder that even the younger generation are filled with apprehension and do not feel that security as to their rights which the newest immigrant enjoys?

The colored people are patient and submissive. In my judgment there is little danger of race conflict if they are permitted to work out their own problem by slow and natural evolution. But the love of their native soil and of their abiding place is a deep-seated instinct with them. I do not know what might happen if the conviction spread among them that they must protect themselves from deportation. They might do what white folks would do, under like circumstances.

Sometimes I think that it would be a good thing -- for white people anyway -- if by magic the colored
people should be lifted out of their present environment, and placed in Africa for a short while. There is one
time of day when colored folk have almost exclusive use of the street cars. In my early morning walks I
notice as the cars stop the shovelers, masons, carpenters, cooks, laundresses, housemaids, nurses, get off
and go in different direction to begin their day's work: What would happen if they all went to Africa? Not
only our household machinery, but almost every kind of business that is in any way dependent upon manual
labor would come to a standstill.

And I am curious to know what would become of southern agriculture. With North Dakota offering
railroad fare, exorbitant wages, short hours, moving pictures, dances and other amusements to induce
laborers to come and harvest the wheat crop, can you imagine what would become of the cotton and the
corn if the colored people of the south were transported from their native land to the jungle? They might
suffer greater mental anguish, but the white folks would be first to feel the economic tragedy.

THERE are over eleven thousand civil service employees working for the government. More than half of
them are in the various departments here in Washington. These employees have competed with whites for
their places, taking the same specified examination. I have the information direct from the Secretary of the
United States Civil Service Commission that except in positions where the physical qualifications are the
important consideration, and in a few of the higher places drawing over eighteen hundred dollars a year,
where personality is required, there is no means of knowing whether applicants are white or colored and
except for the hand writing, whether they are male or female.

The colored people are justly proud of success achieved on their own merit, like that gained in the Civil
Service. This spirit according to every ethical principle should be encouraged by our government. It is the
rock on which democracy rests. The colored people sense the meaning of any governmental discrimination
against them with deep feeling, and the suggestion that the color line may be drawn in the government
service has awakened a resentment I have never known before among the colored people here and, I
understand, has aroused great indignation wherever the possibility of such a course has been discussed in
centers of negro population elsewhere.

There have been various rumors afloat in Washington for some time as to the segregation of employees in
the government service. A few days ago Senator Clapp introduced a resolution asking for the facts as to
segregation of the races in the Post Office Department.

Some weeks ago I received a letter from Miss Nannie Burroughs. President of the National Training
School for Women and Girls -- owned and operated by the Woman's Convention, Auxiliary to National
Baptist Convention -- pleading for justice to the colored people and protesting against the segregation being
instituted in the Bureau of Engraving and Printing.

I wrote the Secretary of the Treasury for the facts. Omitting the formalities of the correspondence, I give
the memorandum to him forwarded to me from the Director of the Bureau in so far as it relates to
segregation of the women, leaving out the part that refers to men.

"MEMORANDUM FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY
WILLIAMS

"In compliance with your request for a memorandum relative to the enclosed letter from Mrs. Belle C. La
Follette, asking to know whether or not it is a fact that an order to segregate the races at the Bureau of
Engraving and Printing has been put into effect, and that another order to exclude colored girls from lunch-
rooms has also been put into effect, I have the honor to state that no such general order has been issued in
this bureau. It is a fact, however, that, in the lunch-rooms used by the printers' assistants, many of whom are
colored, and where there are six tables, two of the tables were assigned especially for the use of the colored
girls for the reason that it is believed that it would be better for them to associate together when eating their
lunches. The colored assistants are permitted free access to the lunch-rooms and are served the same food
as that furnished the white assistants and there have been no objections on the part of the colored girls to
using the tables assigned them
except on the part of three colored assistants who persisted in sitting at the tables occupied by white girls after one or two of the white girls had made an objection to them occupying the same tables. A kindly suggestion was made to them that it would be best for them to occupy tables with girls of their own race, but, as they persisted in disregarding the suggestion, it was necessary for me to give them positive directions to use the tables assigned to the colored assistants.

"With regard to the segregation of the races in the work of the Bureau, I would state that this has not heretofore been fully enforced. There are a great many printers' assistants who are colored, assisting printers who are white men and, as above stated, white and colored men are associated on similar work throughout the bureau, but in divisions where machines are operated by two employees, it has been considered the best practice to assign two girls of the same race to a machine where practicable rather than to have one of each race working together.

"About ten per cent, of the employees of this Bureau are colored, and I am pleased to report that, aside from the troubles above mentioned, there as not been much difficulty with regard to the race question.

Respectfully,
J. E. Ralph, Director.

I asked for the names of the three girls referred to. They were promptly furnished. I wrote the girls quoting that part of the Director's letter that related to their conduct, and suggested that if they were willing to do so, I should be glad to have them state the case from their viewpoint. I expected them to answer by letter and for the sake of accuracy and definiteness and to eliminate any personal element, I should have been glad to have them do so. When they telephoned for an interview, however, I well understood why they might wish to state their case in person.

One of the girls was a graduate of both the high school and normal school of Washington. Another had gone through the second year high school; the other was educated at some seminary in a southern state. They had received their appointments under the civil service -- which, bear in mind, precludes any knowledge of whether they are black or white. They had been employed in the bureau, two of them for eleven years, one for nine. They had been accustomed to buy their lunches and eat them at any vacant seat. I understood them to say, however, that they never forced themselves into white company. Usually they sat by themselves -- but sometimes the white girls did not mind sitting next to them. A change was made in the table arrangements. A woman, not in authority over them, according to the girls' statement, suggested that they occupy a table by themselves. Reply was made that if the order came from the Director it would be heeded, but in the absence of such an order from him, that so long as the food was paid for, they should be entitled to eat it in any seat not occupied. A second suggestion was made to them by a colored male employee who likewise, as the girls believed, had no authority over them. And answer was made to him by the girls that the order should come from the Director.

FOLLOWING this on a certain day, the Director called up two of the girls. A woman prominent socially and in civic work was present. She talked to them about the advisability of colored girls eating by themselves in their own lunch room. One of them answered her that the colored girls had no lunch room: that there was only the waiting room, off from which were the toilets; they said they could bring their lunch, but would buy no food in the lunch room if not permitted to eat it there. When I asked the girls if they were still eating in the lunch room one said, "No, it was no use trying. Our food choked us." Another explained, that when they saw the employees were being segregated in the workrooms they thought that if that could be done of course they had the right to segregate them in the lunch room.

I had this talk with the girls on the 9th of August. On Monday the 11th, one of them came to me with this official correspondence:
MEMORANDUM.

Trimming Room. August 5, 1913.

Chief of Examining Division:

I wish to report Rosebud A. Murraye, an operative in the trimming room for insubordination and disrespectful behavior. She asked to be excused at 2:50 P.M. on August 4th, stating that she was sick. I made out a pass for her as soon as possible and marked it 3 P.M. At 3:35 P.M., however, she was talking with another employee in the hall interfering with her work and when I spoke to her about loitering she answered me in a very disrespectful and impudent manner and intimated that I was lying in stating that she had requested a pass at ten minutes of three o'clock by making the remark that she would allow no one to tell a lie on her.

In addition to this language her entire manner during my conversation with her was insolent and disrespectful.

Respectfully,

EMMA S. BROWN,
Chief of Trimming Room.

MEMORANDUM.

Exam Division. August 5, 1913

To the Director

I have the honor to forward, herewith the memorandum of Miss Emma S. Brown forewoman in this division charging Miss Rosebud A. Murraye, an operative, with insubordination and I therefore recommend her services be dispensed with.

Respectfully,

A. E. BEALES.
August 7, 1913.

MISS ROSEBUD A. MURRAYE,
1623 Corcoran Street, N. W.,
Washington, D.C.

Miss:

I submit herewith, in accordance with Department Circular No. 11, of 1912, for such answer as you may deem necessary to make thereto, a report of the Chief of the Examining Division, charging you with inefficiency by reason of insubordinate conduct. If the statement submitted by you in compliance with this request is, in my opinion, not a sufficient answer to the charges made against you, the matter will be forwarded to the department with a recommendation for your removal from the service. Such answer as you desire to make must be submitted to me within three days from the receipt of this communication.

Respectfully,

J. E. RALPH,
Director.

I could only suggest that she make a written statement to the Director of her case as she had stated it to me and have it corroborated by the official physician of the Bureau. At this writing -- August 13 -- I do not know the outcome.
A. By this comment, La Follette meant that whites should not be stereotyped by their ethnicity.

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B. Francis Griffith Newlands (1848-1917), a Democrat from Nevada, served as a Representative from 1893 to 1902 and as a Senator from 1903 until his death in 1917.

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C. James K. Vardaman (1861-1930) was an openly racist Senator from Mississippi who served from 1912 to 1918.

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D. James T. Heflin (1869-1951) served as a Democratic Representative from Alabama from 1904 to 1920 and as a Senator from 1920 to 1931.

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E. Moses Clapp (1851-1929) served as a Republican Senator from Minnesota from 1901 to 1917.

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Introduction

Belle La Follette received much criticism for her defense of the civil rights of African Americans. In this article, she reprinted one letter that represented the racist views of many white Americans at this time. La Follette used the letter as an opportunity to defend her position in the most strenuous terms.

The Adverse Point of View on "The Color Line"

The following letter is typical of others I have received criticizing what I said in an article in our issue of August 23, entitled "The Color Line." It offers an opportunity to study the adverse point of view.

DR. LEON ASHLEY PEEK
WEST PALM BEACH
FLORIDA

Aug. 23, 1913.

MRS. BELLE C. LA FOLLETTE,
Washington, D.C.

Dear Madam:

Pardon my intrusion upon one of such strong convictions, and may I be permitted to say, prejudices, as yourself. Inasmuch as some of your notions on "The Color Line" have been printed in the "Weekly," it is not improper, I judge, for me to write you in regard to the matter.

One who comes from a state that has less than one-tenth of one per cent of colored inhabitants cannot be expected to know anything about the race. But one who has lived in Washington twenty years without finding out the first principles of the differences between white people and negroes is, I fear, beyond the help of those who have found out a few things.

The reason whites accustomed to negroes object to sitting beside them on the railway trains and street cars, while they do not object to members of the colored race cooking their meals and minding their babies, is that on the public conveyances the races meet on terms of equality, while as servants of course the colored person is by custom considered as servants are usually everywhere. Negroes, at least many of them, like to push themselves into company where they are not wanted: so that laws which merely sanction customs long prevalent in the community, are enacted to keep the races apart in places where they would meet on terms of social equality.

Now, in cases such as your own, pardon me, where from the evident meaning of your writings you would like to meet colored people on terms of social equality, you should not object to those of your own race who have other opinions and prejudices on the subject. In other words you are prejudiced in favor of social equality, and other whites are prejudiced against it. Is social equality one of the "human rights" of any one?

A curious thing I have repeatedly observed in those who come from countries where there is a homogeneous population is that they think the colored race in the community where there are two races, white and black, should receive all the sympathy, and all the rights, and that the whites who have lived for generations among these blacks are unable to judge of them accurately. Why is this? For a concrete instance, why do you think your opinion, based on an admittedly incomplete observation of negroes in a
single city, should be more accurate and more trustworthy, more just, etc., than the universal opinion of millions of native white Americans who have been born and bred among the negroes for generations?

Another thought, what do you think of the "race question" in South Africa or in India?

Unfortunately people with the best intentions in the world go headlong into the negro question, sure that they are right in their preconceived opinions. They do more harm than good. They emphasize the opinions already held by those better informed, and they raise false hopes and thoughts in the minds of the weaker people. Do not play with fire until you have studied its nature. Do not hastily brand your fellow white men and women with injustice and oppression, where you have admittedly not properly studied the matter.

Remember you have lived your life among surroundings quite different from many others. You must study the viewpoint of others. You must see these things not only as they have appeared to you from a distance, but as they appear close at hand: not only as they appear from highly educated (comparatively) negroes, but also as they appear from close acquaintance with the worst and lowest ones of the race. I defy any normal white person in the world to live through the experience of the southern white Americans, and not reach opinions in substantial agreement with them. I have seen many, many instances.

I do not really know why I have written this. You will remain of your own opinion doubtless. In Wisconsin where happily they have few negroes, they have few native white Americans.

Respectfully,

L. A. PEEK.

I AM CONFIDENT our thoughtful readers will sustain me in saying that I do not go headlong into the consideration of any serious question. In writing "The Color Line" I had in mind the "many, many instances" of Northerners who go South to live, who "reach opinions in substantial agreement" with those of Southerners. I have myself often come in contact -- who has not! -- with Northern travelers in the South and with Northern residents of the Southern states, who exclaim, "Oh, when you live in the South, you feel toward the 'niggers' just as the Southerners do, -- only more so."

Never having lived in the South, I cannot say. I have lived in Washington. I specifically stated that I did not speak on the negro question generally nor from the standpoint of scientific investigation, because I wanted it clearly understood that my conclusions were based on observation and experience in this limited field.

In the rather long period of time that the course of political events has kept us in Washington, I have not had any sentimental association with the colored question whatever. My contact has not been very different from that of the average Northern person who goes South to live. I have had colored help; good, bad, and indifferent. I have observed the colored people in their homes, their schools, and their churches; their conduct on the streets and in the street cars. I have listened to all kinds of opinions and conclusions of white people as to their worth and their worthlessness. I admit a certain kindly feeling for colored folk, but otherwise I have no intellectual or emotional bias whatever. And it is not upon any prejudiced or preconceived ideas that my judgment of the colored people here in the District of Columbia is based. It is on the facts as I know them.

I may be mistaken in my conclusions regarding the colored people here in Washington. But I believe my views in this field are entitled to consideration at least equal to that accorded the views of Northerners who go South, and speak with authority of the whole colored race.

ANOTHER THING I tried to make clear in writing "The Color Line" was that I was not discussing the social status of the Negro. The writer of the letter says:

"The reason whites accustomed to Negroes object to sitting beside them on the railway trains
and street cars, while they do not object to members of the colored race cooking their meals and minding their babies, is that on the public conveyances the races meet on terms of equality, while as servants of course the colored person is by custom considered as servants are usually everywhere."

If we ride in a conveyance that is our own, we can invite whom we please to ride with us. If we give a dinner or a reception, we can choose our company, and in accepting or declining an invitation of a social nature, we can draw the class line according to our individual standards. But when we get into any public conveyance, -- in the North at any rate, -- there is no opportunity for social discrimination. There are other racial prejudices than those against the Negro, but when we board a crowded car, they must be put aside. Native and foreigner, Jew and Gentile, Indians, Negroes, share its privileges alike. The employer often sits - more often stands -- crushed against the employee. There are no separate cars for servants, -- maid and mistress are equally entitled to the ride for which they pay. Moreover there are no moral or hygienic distinctions. The thief, the drunkard, the courtesan, are not put off except as they are offensive in behavior. Again, bear in mind, I am not setting up standards for the South, where I am not acquainted. All I contend is that the South should not try to set up its standards for the North or for the District of Columbia, where there is no practical necessity or good reason for race segregation. The goings and comings on the street cars of a very large proportion of the Washington colored population is from their homes to ours, where they mind the babies, cook the meals, drive the horses and the automobiles, and otherwise render services to white people. And I repeat that I cannot see why there is any reason, other than race prejudice, that should make us object to sitting next the people on the street cars who are so intimately associated with all the work of the family.

I do not believe that "the colored race in the community where there are two races, white and black, should receive all the sympathy and all the rights." I laid all my emphasis on exactly the opposite idea, -- that they should receive only the rights and sympathy to which they are entitled on merit.

THE POLICY of drawing the color line in the United States Civil Service was the occasion of my writing the article to which exception is made. The regulations of the Civil Service Commission are such that it is not known whether the person drawn to fill a position, is white or colored. The 11,000 Civil Service places held by the Negroes have been obtained without either prejudice or favor. Merit, not sympathy, demands that they should not be discriminated against and should be accorded the justice due them as citizens of a democracy.

Dr. Peek recognizes that there is a difference -- that there is such a thing as a "comparatively" highly-educated Negro. The Negroes of Washington probably have had a better chance than an equal number of the colored race in any other community of the country. But does not their progress under favorable conditions, offer hope for the future of the race?

As tested by the colored population of the District of Columbia, education and enlightenment do not cause the Negroes to become aggressive and "push themselves into company where they are not wanted." I believe the facts will bear me out, that generally as the Negroes get education and acquire property and realize their opportunity as a race, they care less about social recognition from whites and more about success with their own people. Like other human beings, ignorance and oppression make them a menace. As the opportunity for self-development on their own merit is freely given them, they become better adjusted and more useful members of society.

A. Although the African-American population of Wisconsin was indeed tiny, it was slightly larger than Peek asserts.

**Introduction**

Belle Case La Follette was not alone in protesting segregationist policies in Washington. Wesley Livsey Jones, a Republican Senator from the state of Washington, wrote the following cover letter accompanying a petition which protested the "diabolical system known as ‘Jim Crowism,’" and urged Wilson and his administration to stop all attempts to introduce segregation into the federal government.

Washington, D.C.
September 29, 1913.

My dear Mr. President:

I herewith hand you petition and protest with reference to the alleged segregation of the colored employees in the Departments of the Government here in Washington city for your careful consideration.

It is hard to believe that any discrimination is being made by the officials of the National Government in regard to any of the citizens of this country. So far as the Government is concerned and its officials they cannot afford to practice any discrimination.

Hoping that this petition and protest will receive your careful attention, I am

Very respectfully yours, W L Jones

Trotter's printed address was sent as an enclosure to a letter from Trotter to Wilson, 5 December 1913, in Woodrow Wilson Papers, Series 4, Container 156, Case File 152a, "Negroes-Government Segregation, 1913 December," Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

Introduction

When he initially ran for the presidency, Woodrow Wilson made a conscious appeal for black votes, and enjoyed the support of many African Americans, including Boston Guardian editor William Monroe Trotter. Trotter (1872-1934) had been raised with a strong sense of racial pride. He attended Harvard with fellow activist W.E. B. Du Bois, with whom he worked in the Niagara Movement, a group of African Americans highly critical of Booker T. Washington's accommodationist solution to racial discrimination. Trotter led six different delegations to the White House over the years to protest federal segregation, and launched a variety of demonstrations. In his initial meeting with the president, Trotter, while clearly disturbed by the same policies that Belle La Follette had been publicly denouncing, seemingly accepted Wilson's assurances that the matter would be investigated and satisfactorily resolved. A year later, Trotter met again with the President. On the second occasion (see Document 19) their exchange proved far more rancorous.

William Monroe Trotter's Address to the President

Nov. 6, 1913

There can be no equality, freedom or respect from others, in segregation by the very nature of the case. Placement of employees on any basis except capability is out of the usual course.

Segregation such as barring from the public lavatories and toilets and requiring the use of separate ones must have a reason. This reason can only be that the segregated are considered unclean, diseased or indecent as to their persons, or inferior beings of a lower order, or that other employees have a class prejudice which is to be catered to, or indulged.

If the segregation is for the first or second reason, the Federal Government thereby puts an insult upon its own citizens, equal by law, unparalleled in the history of any nation since governments were established among men. If the last two are the reasons, the Government deliberately denies equality of citizenship, in violation of the Constitution and makes an inferior and a superior class of citizens. No citizen who is barred because of the prejudice of another citizen can be his equal in citizenship. By subjecting the former to the latter's prejudice, the Government denies equality. The indignity of such a segregation is indisputable, for the public have a right to draw their own conclusions as to the reason.

None other of the many racial elements of the citizens are thus treated. That they would regard it as an insult and an indignity will not be questioned anywhere. If separate toilets are provided for Latin, Teutonic, Celtic, Slavic, Semitic and Celtic Americans, then and then only would African Americans be assigned to separation without insult and indignity.

The separate eating tables admitted by Secretary of the Treasury McAdoo,[A] likewise means a declaration of a foulness, indecency, disease, rudeness or essential inferiority, by the Government itself, or a decree that these citizens barred from the general tables shall be subjects of the race prejudice of all the others. This means inequality of citizenship.
All this is true of segregation at desks or in rooms, already notorious under the auditors of the Post Office, the Navy, in the Post Office Department, the Bureau of Engraving and elsewhere. Secretary McAdoo admits a rule against "enforced and unwelcome juxtaposition of white and Negro employees." This is segregation, and of African-American employees at the behest of the prejudice of all other racial classes of employees. It is clear and definite subjection of one element of citizens to the race prejudice of other citizens. It denies equality of citizenship to the former, in fact, unsettles their citizenship altogether. ...

Necessity can not be pleaded as an excuse for this affront and injury. Afro-Americans and other American employees have been working together, eating at the same tables, and using the same lavatories and toilets for two generations. They have worked in peace and harmony and the Government's business has been well executed. Some of the very Afro-American clerks taken from rooms where Americans of other ancestries worked, or from seats in juxtaposition thereto have so worked for twenty-five and thirty years. They did so through two Democratic Administrations. These Democratic Administrations were nearer the abolition of the slavery of African Americans than yours, Mr. President. The same efforts to inaugurate this segregation in Government service were made under your illustrious predecessor, the late President Grover Cleveland, and were stopped by his order, as we trust they will be in short by yourself.

The inauguration of this policy therefore can be attributed to no cause but the personal prejudice of your appointees in the Executive Branch of the Government. Never before was race prejudice and race distinction made official under our National Government, never before incorporated in a National Government policy.

We can not believe that after this concrete evidence of its offensiveness to your Afro-American fellow citizens, you will permit this mistaken practice to continue. In the first place these, your fellow citizens, do not deserve this damming blow at your hands. Their class have helped build this nation from the very formation. They have defended it in every time of peril. Theirs was the first blood shed for the country's independence and it has been shed in every war to protect and preserve the Republic. They have been sore oppressed, but toiled on and struggled up and the semi-centennial of their liberation is most inappropriate of all times, for this National Government to which they have been ever loyal to inaugurate a new humiliation, a new handicap, a new slavery of caste, to resurrect incidents of the old slavery now happily forgotten.

They deserve it not from you, Mr. President, for never in their history did they so overcome traditional fear of party and section as they did last year in voting for you. Thousands upon thousands of them were your friends, and will so remain if there be no segregation and injustice, no stain upon your record and that of your Administration.

They did not expect and cannot believe they will receive this blighting blow from you, a blow such as no other of the varied elements of their fellow citizens have received, because of your assurances when their votes were wanted, that "if I am elected President, I will enforce the Federal Law in its letter and spirit, nay more, in the spirit of the Christian religion. I shall be a Christian gentleman in the White House," and that you would accord equal rights and evenhanded justice to all regardless of race or color. No fair man would say that African-Americans could find these words of promise consistent with a new executive policy of separate toilets, separate eating tables, separate working desks, separate wash rooms for them and for them alone of all the many racial classes in this Republic. Nor would history's verdict be that they square with segregation of this element.

We told you in person before election our fear of Southern sectional prejudice and asked you then, as a condition of advising African-Americans to support your candidacy, whether you as Chief Executive would protect us from its extension and you said you would. In what was tantamount to an agreement with these ten millions you wrote to your "Colored fellow citizens," "it is my earnest wish to see justice done them in every matter, and not mere grudging justice, but justice executed with liberality and cordial good feeling. Every principle of our Constitution commands this and our sympathies should also make it easy." Fairer words were never written and their readers could not possibly have expected their author to countenance the
institution of any new policy in his own branch of the Government now admittedly based on racial prejudice against them, a policy of caste which no President would dare even hint for citizens of any of the many other racial extractions which make up our heterogenous and partly immigrant population. . . .

Again we say, that our hope is in you, in your allegiance to your oath of office, your sense of justice, your personal integrity. For we cannot believe that you would stain your own honor or the record of your administration in history to satisfy sectional prejudice.

Wilson's Reply and a Dialogue

Of course, I need not say that an impressive petition like this will receive my most earnest and most careful consideration; but I want to say in partial reply to what you have said that some people have been interested to misrepresent the situation. Certainly nobody in my cabinet has expressed to me any feeling such as you have felt that they might entertain with regard to the people of your race. I do not think the spirit of discrimination has been shown in any essential matter; certainly not in the matter of promotions. There is not a single instance of that sort, and there will not be. This administration has but very slightly altered the conditions which obtained in the departments in former administrations. I was not aware of anything that justified the agitation, and this order from Mr. Woolley that you have shown me is the first that I have seen that could be called an order of segregation. There have been arrangements made in the Treasury which Secretary McAdoo honestly thought would be acceptable to everybody. The instances brought to my attention have been exceptional instances. They have not been the rule of the administration, and since they have been brought to my attention, we have been taking active steps to see that they were corrected.

There are these difficulties of which we must be patient and tolerant. Things do not happen rapidly in the world, and prejudices are slow to be uprooted. We have to accept them as facts, no matter how much we may deplore them in their moral and social consequences. So that I want you to go away with the feeling that, in the first place, a great deal has been exaggerated, and that, in the second place, there is no policy on the part of the administration looking to segregation. . . .

All that I can assure you at present is that what has been done -- and a great deal less has been done than you imagine -- so far as my inquiries have gone, a great deal less by way of contrast with previous administrations -- has been done in the genuine desire to serve the convenience and agreeable feelings of everybody concerned. Now, mistakes have probably been made, and you ought to assure those of your own people who are misinformed about these things that they must wait for the judgment of the long run to see what exactly happened.

[Trotter] Mr. President, we simply wanted an assurance that it will be worked out. This petition, Mr. President, is simply to show you that any sort of treatment based on color was never meant to be fair. All this we complained of also the year before. Never has a cabinet officer announced this sort of policy heretofore, earlier.

[Wilson] Never has any person announced this policy requiring action.

[Trotter] He said separate tables.

[Wilson] I beg your pardon. If a newspaper had made what we regarded as a gross misrepresentation, it was made in a statement to be announced, a policy to be announced. It was in defense of what was an inexcusable misrepresentation on the part of a certain newspaper that I made that statement. It was not a statement of policy, but it was a statement of fact.

[Trotter] Now, Mr. President, it is true in almost every case that we who suffer know as even you can't know. There would be things that come to us that couldn't possibly come to any other class of citizens. I have found by experience that the only way by which we could convince our best friends that the things which we suffer would be to suffer things together --- that they wear a face that is black or brown, as
we do. And then they would see this democracy in a way which they have never seen it, in a light which they could not possibly see the day --- differences, in a very real sense, experienced by us. We, the representatives of our race, have come from every section of the country to say to you that those who suffer know best because of their restrictions. It is in that spirit we came to you.

[Wilson] I assure you that it will be worked out.

A. William Gibbs McAdoo (1863-1941), Secretary of the Treasury under Wilson from 1913 to 1918, shared the President's view that segregation was "for the good of the [Negro] race" because it eliminated racial friction. McAdoo (who married Wilson's daughter in 1914) sought the presidency in 1920 and in 1924 before serving as a California senator from 1933 to 1938.

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**Introduction**

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People launched its own investigation into the impact of the new segregationist measures on race relations. Belle La Follette supplied to her readers portions of the results of that study, pointedly including selections highlighting the inconsistent application of the new policy, and the unfairness and hypocrisy of the entire program.

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**Segregation in the Civil Service**

IN WHAT I have said in previous issues regarding segregation of civil service employees in the departments of government here in Washington, I have endeavored to be free from personal prejudice, and to discuss in that spirit the facts that have come to my knowledge, and the principle involved.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 26 Vesey Street, New York, is an organization of high standing, among whose officials are many well known and distinguished names, including Jane Addams[A], Miss Lillian D. Wald[B], Dr. J. E. Spingarn[C], and Dr. John Haynes Holmes[D]. The chairman of its board of directors is Mr. Oswald Garrison Villard[E] of New York. Its president is Mr. Moorfield Storey[F] of Boston. Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois[G] is editor of its magazine.

Realizing the importance to the colored race of the issue involved, this Association sent a trained investigator to study and make a report on the situation in the District of Columbia. Those who wish to have this report in full can probably secure one by writing the Association for it. The following is a brief summary of some of the facts disclosed.

IN THE BEGINNING. the investigator says, "Segregation is no new thing in Washington and the present Administration cannot be said to have inaugurated it. The past few months of Democratic Party control, however, have given segregation impetus, and have been marked by more than a beginning of systematic enforcement. It is becoming known as a policy of the present government."

The investigator visited only those departments where segregation was said to have increased considerably under the present Administration. Among other things, the report says regarding the Bureau of Engraving and Printing that, "Colored clerks are segregated in work by being placed at separate tables and in separate sections of rooms whenever possible. White guides told the investigator that it was to be the future policy of the Bureau to segregate all its colored employees, but that this could not be strictly enforced until the Bureau moved into its new building. In both the Miscellaneous Division and Examining Division segregation has been increased. In the former Division, the employees operate perforating machines, one on either side, perforating the blocks of stamps. Here the workers have been paired according to race. In the same room the counters of these stamps have also been segregated according to color. In the Examining Division where tissue separating is carried on, the employees have been grouped according to color."

As to the Postoffice Department, the report says, "In the Dead Letter Office colored men and women have been segregated back of lockers in one corner of the room. The guide (superintendent of the building) explained to the investigator that these lockers had to be moved because in their former position they had interfered with ventilation. He was unable, however, to give a satisfactory explanation of how it happened that all the clerks behind these lockers were colored. The reason could not have been lack of efficiency, because the colored men here were doing a fairly high grade of work, that is, sorting letters and delegating them to the proper division. In another room where the purely mechanical process of opening letters was carried on, all the clerks were white.

"No lunch room is provided for the colored employees in the Post Office Department. The white
employees have a very attractive room. The guide advanced as a convincing argument in explanation of this condition that as no restaurants in Washington were opened to colored people, the government could not be expected to furnish one. He further stated that only one colored man had ‘ever given them trouble’ by trying to get his lunch in this room, and that had happened but once.”

In the Treasury Building, the investigator says, the clerks have not yet been segregated. "In the office of the Auditor for the Postoffice, which is a part of the Treasury Department, but situated in the Postoffice Building, segregation seems to have been carefully worked out. The Chief, a hold-over from the Taft administration, took pains to emphasize the point that he had been segregating colored employees for five years and that as far as his office was concerned, it was no new departure.* * *[H] In one room colored men operate what is known as the ‘gang punch’ and in another room, the force working at the ‘assorting machines’ is entirely colored. White operatives doing the same work occupy separate rooms. In one alcove, which the investigator visited, there were nine colored women working on the ‘key punch.’ The light and ventilation were poor. These women had been moved several times, but originally had been in rooms with white clerks where they had good light and air.* * * All the clerks, both white and colored, were moved out (for a specified purpose). The white clerks, however, were scattered in rooms where they have good light and ventilation, while the colored women were segregated in the alcove. As usual, those segregated were placed in the poorest quarters." The investigator calls attention to the fact, however, that in some of the rooms of this office white and colored employees still work together.

AMONG the illustrations cited by the investigator to prove that efficiency refuses to follow the color line, is the case of a young colored man who has become an expert operator on the adding machine. He is the only colored clerk employed in a room of white clerks doing the same work. The Chief when asked why he left him here said he could not spare him as he was his most expert operator.

"That the basis of the whole segregation idea is caste and not race," says the investigator, "was indicated by the fact that both the Superintendent of the Postoffice Building and the clerk who acted as guide in the Treasury Department, repeatedly called attention to the absence of segregation in the cleaning forces, emphasizing the fairness with which the colored help is treated. When pressed for an explanation of this apparent inconsistency in policy, they stated that they had no complaint from the ‘white scrub ladies.’ In answer to the question as to what would be the procedure, should difficulty arise, they said it would be impossible to segregate without interfering with the efficiency of the work."

The way in which segregation has been effected so far without official orders is worthy of study. No orders have been issued segregating colored people in their work, yet the practice goes on. Generally the excuse is a re-adjustment in the work to increase efficiency. In this reorganization clerks are moved from one room to another, and when the process is completed the colored clerks always find themselves in some mysterious way together.

"As far as could be ascertained," says the investigator, "only one official has given the colored people an opportunity to express their opinion of the policy of segregation. Arrangements for segregation had been made in one of the divisions of the Pension Bureau, but when the Chief of the Division learned that the colored employees were opposed to separation, he gave them an opportunity to vote on the matter. They were unanimous in their opposition. This man is reported to have said that segregation should not be introduced while he was the Chief of the Division."

A. Jane Addams (1860-1935) was an internationally renowned social worker, founder of Hull House, and peace activist.
B. Lillian D. Wald (1867-1940) was a nurse and founder of the Henry Street Settlement on the Lower East Side of New York City.

C. Joel Spingarn was chairman of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

D. John Haynes Holmes (1879-1964) was a Unitarian minister and social activist.

E. Oswald Garrison Villard (1872-1940) was the publisher of the progressive magazine *The Nation* and one of the co-founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

F. Moorfield Storey (1845-1925) was a lawyer and President of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People from 1910 to 1925.

G. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868-1963) was an educator, writer, co-founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and supporter of black nationalism.

H. The asterisks in this document are in the original, probably indicating excerpted portions only were taken from the original investigator's report.
Introduction

The following account of a contingent of women led by Anna Howard Shaw, a physician and president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, calling upon President Woodrow Wilson to urge him to actively support votes for women revealed La Follette's great disappointment in the leadership of the President. Although he was respectful, Wilson granted the women very little time and made light of their serious question about lack of representation. Wilson's minimizing of the concerns of women was similar to his downplaying of the impact of segregation on African Americans.

A Visit to The President

IT WAS in no gay spirit that the ninety-four representatives of the States marched from the suffrage headquarters on F Street to the White House offices on Monday December eighth. Probably very few of us expected President Wilson to announce himself in favor of equal suffrage. And yet we were not quite prepared for the disappointment that follows an unsuccessful effort, even though the result has been anticipated.

We were notified before we left Headquarters that Dr. Shaw would be given only ten minutes. While waiting in the outer room of the White House another announcement was made that Dr. Shaw would also do the handshaking for the party. This message was interpreted by most of those who heard it as coming from the President's office. Mrs. McCormick gave it out on her own authority, as I afterwards learned, with the object of protecting every second of Dr. Shaw's time. She feared the party might start to shake hands on entering the room unless notified not to do so.

When we had filed through the corridor and grouped ourselves about the President, who stood at his desk, Dr. Shaw, stepping a little in advance of us, began addressing him in a low, clear, earnest voice. She asked the President's assistance in the matter of bringing a constitutional amendment before Congress in any way that might appeal to his judgment, but she suggested three ways: a special message asking Congress to submit to the legislatures of the country an amendment to the national constitution enfranchising the women citizens of the United States; if this did not appeal to the President, she asked that he include such a recommendation in another message that he might send to Congress in behalf of the men citizens of Hawaii, Alaska, and other countries; failing in this, she asked that he use the Administration's power to influence the Rules Committee of the House of Representatives to appoint a separate suffrage committee that would have time for the proper consideration of this important subject. Dr. Shaw's little speech in directness, in fitness to the occasion, together with its fine spirit and beauty of presentation, was simply perfect.

The President listened in an attitude of respectful and interested attention. It was impressive, -- this woman, this orator, who had given her life to a cause, speaking to this man, this scholar and student of government, now President, each exemplifying the highest type of American citizenship. There was nothing to mar the dignity of the occasion, unless one chanced to see, as I did, the nods and nudges exchanged by a group of young men employees who came from an adjoining room apparently with no purpose except to satisfy their curiosity. It is these little things that are often most significant. I could not but think how different the attitude of these young men would be, if women were enfranchised, and were there petitioning the Chief Executive on some matter in which they were interested as voters. In a way this reflection might be applied to the time limit of the hearing. Voters from Podunk who had come to present their side of a local postoffice quarrel could hardly have been given less than ten minutes. Nor do I believe they would have been hurried out of the room as we, who stood near the door were, by an officious young man who seemed to fear we might not know when we dismissed.
The President's reply to Dr. Shaw was made in a pleasant, conversational tone, and was free from flattery, circumlocution or condescension. He took the position that as President, he was following the rule he had set for himself as Governor of New Jersey, that he was not at liberty to urge upon Congress in messages, policies which have not had the organic consideration of those for whom he was the spokesman; that he had never initiated issues and he could not therefore, send a message to Congress as requested. He said, however, he was always glad to be consulted by his colleagues, and when one member of the House Rules Committee had asked him what he thought about creating a special committee for the consideration of the question of woman suffrage, he had not hesitated to tell him that he considered it a proper thing to do.

Dr. Shaw asked permission to put one question. The President kindly assented. "As we are members of no political party, to whom are we to look as a spokesman?" "You speak for yourselves most admirably," replied the President smilingly. A laugh went round the room. But Dr. Shaw insisted with serious earnestness, "I mean, who shall speak authoritatively for us?"

"Yes, I understand," said the President.

And that ended the interview.

As I passed out of the White House with Harriet Taylor Upton, the well known suffragist, she said. "It is discouraging. This is the fourth President I have been to see." And I remembered that twenty-five years ago, when we were in Washington, her father, Ezra Taylor of Ohio, then one of the oldest members of Congress in service and one of the ablest, was an earnest advocate of equal suffrage. So was Tom Reed. There was real sadness in Mrs. Upton's face, usually so jolly and cheerful.

The wind blew cold. I heard some one say something about the President's speech being a wet blanket. Others were optimistic and thought he had meant us to understand that he was personally favorable although officially handicapped. I noticed from the newspaper reports that Dr. Shaw makes much of the fact that the President expressed himself favorably as to the creation of a Woman Suffrage Committee in the House.
**Introduction**

The quantity of protests from many sources forced the Wilson administration to abandon the more formal efforts to segregate federal offices. Moorfield Storey, President of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and other men prominent in the organization acknowledged this victory, even while urging the President to go further in opposing "this injustice" in the following telegram.

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New York, Jan. 6, 1914.

Resolved that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, in annual meeting assembled, welcome the report that segregation of colored employees in Federal departments at Washington has been checked. Be it further Resolved, that the President of the United States be urged to put an entire stop to this injustice at once. Resolved, that these resolutions be telegraphed to the President of the United States and to the Secretary of the Treasury.

Moorfield Story, President;
Oswald Garrison Villard,[A]
Joel E. Spingarn,[B]
Charles Edward Russell,[C]

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A. Oswald Garrison Villard (1872-1940) was the publisher of the progressive magazine *The Nation*, and one of the co-founders of the NAACP.

*Back to Text*

B. Joel Spingarn was chairman of the NAACP and served on its Board of Directors.

*Back to Text*

C. Charles Edward Russell (1860-1941) was an NAACP member. Socialist, and Pulitzer Prize-winning author.

*Back to Text*
In her efforts to defend African Americans against negative stereotyping, Belle La Follette showcased a letter from a "refined intelligent" African-American woman living in Paris. The letter-writer not only emphasized all that her race had done for the United States, but suggested that continued racism would lead to race war.

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A Refined, intelligent colored woman, the mother of two finely educated sons studying in Paris, writes from that foreign center, where there is no race discrimination:

"I have heard of the splendid articles appearing in LA FOLLETTE’S regarding segregation. If only the United States were full of good friends like you! Why are we so persecuted?

"To labor faithfully for centuries without hope of reward to be the best of patriots in time of trouble, to be the most law abiding element in the common wealth -- are these things crimes? All this and more we have faithfully performed.

"What is it in the cold cruel heart of the white man that causes him to hound and oppress me and mine! Is he determined to turn all of the love and confidence of the Negro to bitterest hatred? That is the inevitable end unless he changes his course.

"Will not the white man hear before it too late, or is he determined to bring about war, revolution and bloodshed?"

**Introduction**

Belle Case La Follette very publicly attacked segregation, arguing it not only harmed African Americans, but white segregationists as well. In this lengthy article she reprinted the correspondence surrounding the unsuccessful efforts to have Rosebud Murray reinstated at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. She also included letters both attacking and supporting her speeches condemning segregation and prejudice, which had received a fair amount of attention in the press.

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**Color Line To Date**

**OUR READERS**, who have followed what has been said from time to time on these pages respecting proposed segregation of the races in the street cars here at the national capital and concerning the proposed segregation of Civil Service employees in the government of the United States, will not be surprised to know that in response to invitations I spoke on that subject recently, here in Washington on a Sunday afternoon, before a large meeting of colored people under the auspices of the Young Men's Christian Association, and also addressed the Association for the Advancement of Colored People at their annual banquet in New York. They will doubtless be astonished that so simple a proceeding was the occasion of divers[e] comment and adverse criticism.

It will be remembered (see LA FOLLETTE'S, August 23, August 30, September 13, 1913) that when my attention was called to the matter of segregation in the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, I applied directly to the Secretary of the Treasury, Mr. McAdoo, for the facts. He submitted an answer from the Director of the Bureau, Mr. Ralph, which frankly admitted (as shown by the following extract) that segregation was being enforced:

"It is a fact, however, that, in the lunch-rooms used by the printers' assistants, many of whom are colored, and where there are six tables, two of the tables were assigned especially for the use of the colored girls for the reason that it is believed that it would be better for them to associate together when eating their lunches. **[*][A]** There have been no objections on the part of the colored girls to using the tables assigned to them, except on the part of three colored assistants who persisted in sitting at the tables occupied by white girls after one or two of the white girls had made an objection to them occupying the same tables. A kindly suggestion was made to them that it would be best for them to occupy tables with girls of their own race, but, as they persisted in disregarding the suggestion, it was necessary for me to give them positive directions to use the tables assigned to the colored assistants."

(The italics are mine. I emphasize this statement in order to contrast it with the one made later as to the same fact, which I likewise italicize.)

**WHEN** I asked for the names of the three girls referred to, they were promptly furnished. They came to my house for an interview. One of them was a graduate of both the high school and the normal school of Washington; another had finished second year high school; the third had been educated at a seminary in a southern state. They had obtained their positions under the Civil Service examinations, which are so conducted that the color or sex of applicants are not known, and appointments are secured on merit only. They had been employed in the Bureau, two of them eleven years, one nine years. They told me they had been accustomed to buy their luncheons in the lunch room, and to eat them in any vacant seat. I understood them, however, to say that they had never forced themselves into white company. When it was suggested to them that they buy their luncheons and go to the dressing room to eat them, they had objected that because the toilets were off the dressing room it was an unsuitable place in which to eat.
TWO DAYS after this talk, one of the girls, Miss Murraye, came to me with notice of her dismissal. We have already published the correspondence relating to it. The order of appeal from dismissal by the Director of the Bureau is to the Secretary of the Treasury and then to the President of the United States. As Miss Murraye's story is for the most part told in her letter to the President, I print it here. I myself wrote a letter to accompany her appeal, in which I cited that portion of Director Ralph's communication quoted above. By way of introduction, I said:

"Permit me to explain my interest in Miss Murraye's inclosed appeal to you for reinstatement. I fear that I may have been indirectly responsible for her removal from office, and I should be sorry to have any act of mine result in injustice to a working woman. In order to remain as free as possible from prejudice, I have purposefully refrained from any personal investigation of the merits of her case.

"It would seem from the record alone that the punishment of dismissal was rather severe for the offense, and that a reprimand or suspension might have served the purpose of discipline with an employee of eleven years' standing. However, I should not presume to take your time for considering an individual wrong if the record did not appear also to involve the larger question of human rights."

MISS MURRAYE'S LETTER TO PRESIDENT WILSON.

2131 Mass. Ave., N. W.
Washington, D. C.,
November 25, 1913.

Mr. President:

Having graduated for Scotia Seminary under the Rev. Dr. D. J. Satterfield, I took the Civil Service Examination and was appointed as Printers' Assistant at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, December 21, 1904, and served the Government faithfully, as an efficient employee up until August 21, 1913, when I was dismissed.

During the nine years of service I received several promotions and had reached the last promotion which was as far as I could go, and up to the time of my dismissal I had never had any charges preferred against me.

On August 4, 1913, I was troubled severely with my eyes and found it necessary to ask to be excused at five minutes of three o'clock, from my work. After hesitating quite a while my forelady, Miss Emma S. Brown, consented to see about my pass. While she was securing the pass I put my machine in order and made out my pass which made it fully 3:15 o'clock before I left the room. I then boarded an elevator and went to the dressing room to make the necessary toilet for the street, returning to go out at half past 3 o'clock. Miss Brown met me in the adjoining room when I was in the act of handing one of the employees her pocketbook, and complained that I had taken too long to get ready to go and she and the acting time clerk, Miss McGraffe, insisted that it was half past two o'clock when I asked off. I stated that it was five minutes of three o'clock when I asked off and that I could prove it. That I did not tell a story on any one and I did not want one told on me. Seeing that I was waiting to report the case to the chief of the division; Miss Brown waited also and succeeded in speaking to Miss Bealle first. Then Miss Bealle came over and said, "Rose, when Miss Brown gave you your pass why didn't you take it and go home; what did you want to call a girl out of Miss Brown's room for?" I explained to Miss Bealle that I had not called anyone out of Miss Brown's room and thought it very wrong of Miss Brown to say so when she knew that I had not. Miss Bealle then told me to hush and go on home. Having had my eyes treated by the Bureau Doctor before going home. I stayed out the next day and worked on them myself, returning to work the following day.

On August 11, '13, I received a registered letter from Director Joseph E. Ralph, in which he inclosed the charges made against me by Miss Emma S. Brown and a recommendation for my dismissal by Miss Bealle. I was given three days in which to reply to the charges, with the understanding that if the statement
submitted by me in compliance with Mr. Ralph's request was not in his opinion, a sufficient answer to the charges made against me, -- the matter would be forwarded to the Department and a recommendation for my removal from the service.

In reply I stated the case clearly and truthfully and the only reply received was a dismissal at the close of my day's work on August 21st, 1913.

I then wrote Secretary McAdoo on the 23rd of August, requesting him to reopen the case and grant me a hearing. Receiving no reply, I then wrote him again on the 24th of October making the same appeal.

November 4, 1913, I received the following communication from Assistant Secretary John Skelton Williams:

"Madam: By direction of the Secretary and in reply to your communication of the 24th ultime, relative to your separation from the service of this Department, you are informed that you were removed on charges of insubordination, and the Department sees no ground for re-opening the case."

Let me state here, that the charge made against me was "inefficiency by way of insubordinate conduct." During the entire period in which I served the Government, I was never guilty of insubordination and I feel that I have been unjustly treated and appeal to you as a Christian man and head of this vast Government, to have my case re-opened and justice given.

Very respectfully,
(Signed) ROSEBUD A. MURRAYE.

THE WHITE HOUSE
Washington, December 1, 1913.

My dear Mrs. La Follette:

The President directs me to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of November 26th in the Interest of Miss Rosebud A. Murraye, and to say that he is taking up the matter with the Secretary of the Treasury.

Sincerely yours,
(Signed) J. P. Tumulty, Secretary to the President.

Mrs. Robert M. La Follette,
3320 Avenue of the Presidents,
Washington, D. C.

THE WHITE HOUSE
Washington, December 17, 1913.

My dear Mrs. La Follette:

With reference to your letter of November 29th, the President directs me to send to you for your information the enclosed copy of a letter from the Secretary of the Treasury and accompanying report of the Director of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing which explain themselves.

Sincerely yours,
(Signed) J. P. Tumulty, Secretary to the President.
December 17, 1913.

Dear Mr. President:

In response to the letter of Secretary Tumulty of December 1st, asking, for you, a report and recommendation in the case of Rosebud A. Murraye, recently dismissed from the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, I beg to enclose herewith a report from the Director of the Bureau in reference to the case.

In view of all the circumstances the Department, as stated to Miss Murraye, in a communication recently addressed to her, sees no ground for re-opening the case.

Cordially and faithfully yours,

(Signed) W. G. McAdoo.

The President,
The White House.

THIS REPORT of Director Ralph referred to in Secretary McAdoo's letter is a lengthy one, and differs little in substance from that previously published, except that it is more emphatic. I cite only the portion bearing directly on the matter of segregation of the girls in the lunch room:

"There has been no change under this administration in the practice that prevailed previous thereto with regard to the segregation of colored employees. It has been usual in this Bureau for a great many years to provide the colored employees with separate lockers and dressing rooms and they have used the lunch-rooms in common with the white employees except that there have been tables provided which the colored employees usually occupied. There has been very little difficulty to this question until recently when, as stated in Mrs. La Follette's letter, three colored employees persisted in using tables assigned to white girls after a committee of white girls from the Printers' Assistants' Labor Union had made objections to them occupying the same tables and it was necessary to give them positive instructions on the subject. Aside from these three instances, there have been no objections on the part of the colored girls to having separate dressing rooms and tables in lunch-rooms. Colored employees have expressed themselves as believing that arrangements of this kind, including separate toilet conveniences, were very satisfactory and proper, and it would seem that the claim of discrimination is made only by colored persons who do not desire to associate with members of their own race. A number of colored assistants preferred to keep together at lunch-time and eat their luncheons in the dressing rooms instead of at the tables in the lunch-room and to accommodate these girls, stools and tables were provided in an enclosed portion of the dressing room very near the lunch room and this arrangement has proven very acceptable and satisfactory to those that take advantage of it."

IT IS NOT MY purpose to discuss the issue at this time. I only give the data that brings the record up to date. But I think I should state in this connection that the Secretary of the Treasury, Mr. McAdoo in conversation with Mr. La Follette relating to another matter, said to him that there was nothing in all this talk of segregation. And yet our readers will observe by the official correspondence that the Secretary of the Treasury endorses Mr. Ralph's last letter.

I do not know how this communication may read to those not conversant with the conditions here in Washington, but when I read it to the Y.M.C.A. audience, in which there were large numbers of civil service employees, there was no doubt about how they felt concerning it.
AT THIS Y.M.C.A. meeting and in the New York address, I called attention to the proof of enforced segregation in the government service. I said that the Negroes had submitted to discrimination in travel, in hotels, in public entertainments, in schools and in churches; that under conservative leaders they had remained silent when deprived of the ballot, depending on their economic and educational progress to bring them justice and recognition though a gradual evolution in public sentiment.

But to have the United States Government take a backward step, to have the color line drawn in places they have won on their merit, to be humiliated, repressed and degraded at the capital of the nation by their own government, which has no right to discriminate among its citizens, is a body blow to hope and pride and incentive.

The colored people have shown remarkable self restraint and dignity with the increase of educational advantages. They are more and more demonstrating their power of self help and of separate race development. We should remember it is not the industrious, intelligent, prosperous, free element of any race that threatens society; it is the idle, ignorant, repressed that constitute the menace.

Continued violations of fundamental principles of human rights touching a race that constitutes one-tenth of our citizenship must ultimately degrade our standards, corrupt our ideals, and destroy our sense of democracy.

In all earnestness I said, that it is more truly for the good of the Caucasian than the Ethiopian race that we call a halt and take an accounting as to what unjust discrimination against the colored civil service employees means to our national life. It is in no way a matter of social privilege. It is a matter of civic right.

If the South can sustain its contention to maintain its own standards for the South, it surely cannot presume to foist those southern standards upon the United States government, and insist on segregation in the street cars of the District of Columbia and in the work performed for the United States Government by civil service employees here in Washington.

I also said there could be no reason other than race prejudice, to cause us to object to sitting next those people in the street car or to working next to them in the government service, who are so intimately associated with the care of our children, the cooking of our food and the driving of carriages and motors.

I HAVE received many communications and clippings expressing different points of view as to my position, a few of which follow:

A Virginian sends me an editorial, which appeared in the *Roanoke Times*, entitled "Mrs. La Follette's Tongue." It is full of bitter tirade, but I only cite the portion that states the point of view of the editor as regards segregation here in the District of Columbia:

"Mrs. La Follette, wife of Senator La Follette of Wisconsin may, or may not be pleased by the results of her speech to a congregation of colored people in Washington Sunday. She protested bitterly against the proposed segregation of colored and white people in the government departments and in street cars. *** There is no reason why the members of the races should not be kept apart in the government departments and in the street cars. *** In the South we have certain instincts and reasons to which we intend to adhere. *** It is not likely that the La Follotelles will gain either popularity or respect anywhere in the country by scattering firebrands or preaching racial and social equality."

Another anonymous writer sends a clipping with the following comment:

"This kind of business does not raise you very much in the estimation of decent white people. But it may get some votes (Negro) for the Senator. Don't do this again, please. For a white lady to address a Negro audience is out of place."
Another person, who fails to give the name, writes:

"In regard to your address of Sunday the fourth, perhaps you may call race segregation a disgrace, but it is not half as disgraceful to the white race as you are. It may be that you do not belong to the white race, just happened that you are a little light in color. Good advice to the people of this city would be to get the Anarchists or Whitecaps behind you. Written by a real white person with no black stripe down the back like you."

ON THE other side of the question, I received this letter from an evidently refined Southern woman:

"I have read in the Washington Post an account of your efforts to aid the colored people of the District and to prevent their segregation, and although entirely unknown to you I want to tell you of my admiration of your action and of my deep sympathy for those unfortunate and oppressed people. I myself am a Southerner, and I have not only been thrown with colored people all my life, but have been an indignant, if silent, witness of the cruel injustice with which they are treated. I trust your noble efforts in their behalf may be crowned with at least some measure of success."

A Brigadier General of the United States Army says:

"I want to thank you for your brave words for the Negro last night. I served as an officer of the Regular Army in the 10th Cavalry, a colored regiment, from March, 1867, to February, 1901. The law creating four regiments of colored men is to my mind a clear violation of constitutional amendments and an example and warrant for about all our ‘Jim Crow Car’ conditions."

A prominent colored woman writes:

"Allow me once again to thank you for the words so sincere and true uttered in your great speech of Sunday afternoon. You cannot imagine, nor can I adequately describe their tremendous effect upon all who heard them. The speech in conjunction with the personality of the speaker has set in motion a wave of feeling which will be of far reaching influence.

"I have made it a point in the short time which has intervened to visit as many homes as possible and I find your speech the topic which overshadows all others.

"If all colored voters could have heard or could hear your presentation of the subject of segregation it is my humble opinion there would be no question as to how the balance of power would turn in the next election. I believe that again would ‘the stone which the builders rejected become the chief stone of the corner.’

"May God continue to bless you, may He continue to lead you, may He continue to give you courage to do and to dare."

A Wisconsin veteran of the Civil War now in the Government Printing Office writes the following interesting letter:

"I write to thank you for the bold and noble stand you have taken in defense of the colored people. They needed just such a voice as you raise in their behalf. Your plea is heaven born. Keep up the fight!

"I am a printer in the Government Printing Office. I work with blacks who are very proficient in their work. The colored printers are high in their efficiency rating. They are courteous and gentlemanly under great provocation sometimes. Some are exceptionally well educated and expert, -- the equal of any whites we have, -- and I feel acutely the indignities heaped upon
them at times by their fellow workmen.

"My first ‘race’ experience was in the Glover Rescue case in Milwaukee, I think in 1854. We then would not allow a slave to be returned to his master. [B] He had stepped on Wisconsin soil and was free. The beating down of the Milwaukee jail was an incident.

"In 1856 I went to Kansas with a party from Milwaukee to prevent slavery extension over its beautiful area. In that contest old John Brown [C] came to the front with others. I was taken prisoner by United States troops, but escaped. By the way of the ‘underground railroad,’ in the company of a runaway slave, I reached my home in Milwaukee.

"In April 1861 I enlisted in the 5th Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry (Company B, a Milwaukee Company). In course of time I was made Adjutant of the First Eastern Shore Maryland Volunteer Infantry. I served in the Civil War three years, six months, and twenty days.

"For three years and a half I was in the Chilocco (Oklahoma) Indian School, and I have come to the belief that the respect we have for that race is born of the fear they have kindled in the hearts of the whites. And yet, I do not think it possible in ordinary life to remove a prejudice with a club. Education and religion are the sure remedies. Along that line let us work.

"Again I thank you. The black race needs such as you to aid them. The white race needs you too to bring it to its senses."

Reverend Olympia Brown, the veteran woman suffragist, now living in New York City, says:

"I write to thank you for your address as quoted in the New York Evening Post at the meeting of the Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The segregation of the Negro in the departments at Washington and the proposal to limit their power to hold lands is a disgrace, not merely to the present administration but to the whole country."

A. Asterisks in this document are in the original, indicating omissions from the source quoted by La Follette.

Back to Text

B. Joshua Glover was an escaped slave who sought asylum in Racine, Wisconsin in 1854. After the discovery of Glover and his arrest by two deputy United States marshals, abolitionists rescued him from jail and conveyed him to Canada.

Back to Text

C. John Brown (1800-1859) was a deeply religious abolitionist who was hanged for his raid on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. The Kansas "contest" to which this writer referred was guerrilla fighting between pro- and anti-slavery forces in Kansas as residents in the territory divided over whether to seek admission to the United States as a slave or free state. John Brown led an anti-slavery raid of Pottawatomie, killing four pro-slavery people.

Back to Text
Introduction

In this column, La Follette reprinted letters she had received revealing the range of solutions her readers offered to the "race problem." La Follette's columns clearly aroused attention around the country.

The Color Line
Various Points of View

FROM ADDAMS COUNTY, WISCONSIN

PLEASE accept our sincere thanks for the never forgotten steps you have taken to protect a downtrodden race. It seems when the colored race is on a road to higher position there are many that do all they can to keep them back. I wonder if their oppressors ever think of the 31st verse, 68th chapter of Psalms in which we are told, "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands to God."

May God bless and comfort you in this great struggle, in trying to treat every race as "Human." I remain as ever an humble subscriber of LA FOLLETTE'S WEEKLY. I am poor but I want to tell you I am for the steps you have taken in defending the right.

FROM TOPEKA, KANSAS

I READ the unjust letters in your January 24 issue of your Magazine. Yes, this race segregation is a disgrace to all decent white people.

We spend millions of dollars each year for foreign missions, but we do need missionaries here at home to civilize such people as those who wrote those letters to you.

What race has made any better progress than the American Negro in the last fifty years. He was freed and was given nothing but a pair of tow linen trousers and a shirt, shoes without stockings. He has educated himself and bought property and now it is a disgrace for a Negro to hold property where there are whites. Yes, I am pleading for higher education for the American Negro. For more education and religion and a few home missionaries which will advance the American Negro more than conquer him and will also solve the problem "What shall we do with the Negro?"

FROM CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE

A COLORED woman writing from Paris (LA FOLLETTE'S, 10th of January) is afraid there will be war, revolution and bloodshed in America on account of the Black People. Once in our country, was waged a most curious war, white compatriots, fought one another, for an alien race, while scoffing Europe derided! Never again will the Nation so waste its strength and money! Why will not the freed people, go to Africa to rescue their own race from the incoming tide of Mongolians and English. Roosevelt has said that "Africa was destined to become a white man's country." What did he mean? Did he foresee the Black man, driven back into the jungle with the Lions and the Tigers? Let the advanced Negroes of America go to the rescue of their own race in Africa! They there, can attain their highest development, whatever that may be -- they may at least strive against extinction! A more worthy strife than an ignoble attempt for social equality with an alien and unwilling people! Let them try to develop Africa, their Fatherland! The attempt will be as difficult as was the settlement of America by the British before the advent of the steam-ships. The missionaries will gladly give their aid. A struggling people has the sympathy of the wide world; but the aim must be a worthy one -- not a vain and hopeless one -- like that of social equality among aliens! The
ambition must be devoid of idiotic demands!

FROM WHITNEY, TEXAS

I am making bold to write you a few lines in regard to the race question or problem as I see it.

I have been among Negroes all my life. I have been forced by necessity to labor side by side with them, and therefore I think that I should know something about them. A Negro will always think more of a white person that holds himself aloof from him than he does of one that doesn't.

I don't think I am prejudiced against the Negro, but the Negroes, the more ignorant ones anyway, are prejudiced against the whites.

I wish you could see them as I have, I feel sure that you would decide that they are very low in morals. Of course, if they were given a better chance I suppose they would improve some.

The well-to-do whites in the South want them to remain in ignorance and poverty so they can use, or rather manage, them better. They are an important club to hold the poor whites in submission with.

They will only pay the Negroes the very lowest wages, then swindle them out of the greater part of that. They make it a point to keep them in debt, but --

I don't want to eat food prepared by Negroes, I don't want to work with them or be around them at all, -- I believe in the absolute segregation. Give them a territory like the Indians, and also give us, (both the poor blacks and whites) more nearly what is coming to us. Give us education, give us opportunity, give us freedom, in fact as well as in theory, and then perhaps we will work out our own salvation.

I don't like your methods much, for the reason that I think you're starting at the wrong end of the situation. Don't try to force the Negro on the white workers in the employment of the government; it's bad for both, bad for the white because it will sooner or later lower their moral standards, and bad for the Negroes because it makes a fool of them generally.

I respect you more than I do the old-time "nigger" loving southern Democrats who want segregation enough to keep the "nigger" in his place, as they say, and yet would be willing to go to war again to prevent real segregation or colonization. I hope you will receive this, and remember there are thousands of good white people in the South that in some respects are worse off than the Negroes.
Introduction

This very positive review of Belle La Follette's "Home and Education" department for La Follette's *Magazine* reveals the superficiality of most magazine and newspaper articles written for women. La Follette's column stood out because she respected her female readers as intelligent people who were interested in all important aspects of the modern world. This article also shows the large readership her column attracted, ensuring that her antisegregationist views found a wide audience.

"A New Sort of Woman's Page"

By SELENE ARMSTRONG HARMON

In the "Cincinnati Enquirer"

ONE OF THE CLEVEREST and most readable woman's pages in the country is edited by Belle Case La Follette, wife of Senator Robert M. La Follette of Wisconsin. Mrs. La Follette conducts a department for women readers in the weekly publication which her husband edits. Though the fact is not generally known, she is a pioneer in the establishment of a new sort of women's page. She was probably the first editor of a woman's department to go on a strike against the conventional formulas for hair dye and the accepted recipes for beauty. Despite advice to the contrary from experienced editors, she decided to give her readers from the start a stronger intellectual food than vaseline and cold creams. With Miss Caroline L. Hunt, former professor of home economics at the University of Wisconsin, as assistant, Mrs. La Follette inaugurated in the first issue of her husband's paper a woman's department after her own heart.

"I have written," she says, "upon the supposition that no subject is too broad, too dignified, too advanced for women readers. I was advised against conducting a department which should deal seriously with health, education, child training, suffrage and other matters of vital importance to women. The response which the serious treatment of these themes has aroused among my readers, however, proves the truth of what Miss Hunt and I argued to our friends some years ago. That was, that woman has made progress. Time was, perhaps, when she could succeed socially, and as a wife and mother, by being merely sweet and pretty. Now she cannot. An alert and trained intelligence is the essential requirement which modern society makes of its women."

Miss Hunt is no longer associated with Mrs. La Follette in her work, so the latter now gives most of her leisure time to her editorial duties. She not only keeps her readers informed on all the movements of the day which touch upon child life, the home and the progress of women along their various lines of endeavor. In addition to this she gives these readers frequent glimpses of the interesting personalities with which she comes in contact during a Washington season; does not consider the topic of dress beneath her dignity as a writer, and often enlivenes her pages with some lively chat on lighter topics.

Mrs. La Follette, like her husband, is an ardent advocate of equal suffrage. For some years she has made it her contribution to the suffrage movement whenever a request to do so came from any organization in Washington, or nearby. She is a fluent speaker, uses a conversational style of address and is always independent and fearless in her expression of opinion.

Senator and Mrs. La Follette in their early youth were students together at the University of Wisconsin. Ever since their graduation from that institution they have been profoundly interested in its advancement.
One of their sons is at present a student there, and they expect their two younger children to attend the same institution. Senator and Mrs. La Follette have four children. The eldest, Fola, is on the stage, and is the wife of George Middleton, the playwright. The other children are Robert, Philip and Mary.
An Address to the President by William Monroe Trotter

[Nov. 12, 1914]

One year ago we presented a national petition, signed by Afro-Americans in thirty-eight states, protesting against the segregation of employees of the national government whose ancestry could be traced in whole or in part to Africa, as instituted under your administration in the treasury and postoffice departments. We then appealed to you to undo this race segregation in accord with your duty as president and with your pre-election pledges. We stated that there could be no freedom, no respect from others, and no equality of citizenship under segregation for races, especially when applied to but one of the many racial elements in the government employ. For such placement of employees means a charge by the government of physical indecency or infection, or of being a lower order of beings, or a subjection to the prejudices of other citizens, which constitutes inferiority of status. We protested such segregation as to working positions, eating tables, dressing rooms, rest rooms, lockers and especially public toilets in government buildings. We stated that such segregation was a public humiliation and degradatio, entirely unmerited and far-reaching in its injurious effects, a gratuitous blow against ever-loyal citizens and against those many of whom aided and supported your elevation to the presidency of our common country.

At that time you stated you would investigate conditions for yourself. Now, after the lapse of a year, we have come back, having found that all forms of segregation of government employes of African extraction are still practiced in the treasury and postoffice department buildings, and to a certain extent have spread into other government buildings.

Under the treasury department, in the bureau of engraving and printing, there is segregation not only in dressing rooms, but in working positions, Afro-American employes being herded at separate tables, in eating, and in toilets. In the navy department there is herding at desks and separation in lavatories; in the postoffice department there is separation in work for Afro-American women in the alcove on the eighth floor, of Afro-American men in rooms on the seventh floor, with forbidding even of entrance into an adjoining room occupied by white clerks on the seventh floor, and of Afro-American men in separate rooms just instituted on the sixth floor, with separate lavatories for Afro-American men on the eighth floor; in the main treasury building in separate lavatories in the basement; in the interior department separate lavatories, which were specifically pointed out to you at our first hearing; in the state and other departments in separate lavatories; in marine hospital service building in separate lavatories, though there is but one Afro-American clerk to use it; in the war department in separate lavatories; in the postoffice department building separate lavatories; in the sewing and bindery divisions of the government printing office on the fifth floor there is herding at working positions of Afro-American women and separation in lavatories, and new segregation instituted by the division chief since our first audience with you. This lavatory segregation is the most degrading, most insulting of all. Afro-American employes who use the regular public lavatories on the floors where they work are cautioned and are then warned by superior officers against insubordination.
We have come by vote of this league to set before you this definite continuance of race segregation and to renew the protest and to ask you to abolish segregation of Afro-American employes in the executive department.

Because we cannot believe you capable of any disregard of your pledges we have been sent by the alarmed Americans citizens of color. They realize that if they can be segregated and thus humiliated by the national government at the national capital the beginning is made for the spread of that persecution and prosecution which makes property and life itself insecure in the South, the foundation of the whole fabric of their citizenship is unsettled.

They have made plain enough to you their opposition to segregation last year by a national antisegregation petition, this year by a protest registered at the polls, voting against every Democratic candidate save those outspoken against segregation. The only Democrat elected governor in the eastern states was Governor Walsh of Massachusetts, who appealed to you by letter to stop segregation. Thus have the Afro-Americans shown how they detest segregation.

In fact, so intense is their resentment that the movement to divide this solid race vote and make peace with the national Democracy, so auspiciously revived when you ran for the presidency, and which some of our families for two generations have been risking all to promote, bids fair to be undone.

Only two years ago you were heralded as perhaps the second Lincoln, and now the Afro-American leaders who supported you are hounded as false leaders and traitors to their race. What a change segregation has wrought!

You said that your "Colored fellow citizens could depend upon you for everything which would assist in advancing the interests of their race in the United States." Consider this pledge in the face of the continued segregation! Fellow citizenship means congregation. Segregation destroys fellowship and citizenship.

Consider that any passerby on the streets of the national capital, whether he be black or white, can enter and use the public lavatories in government buildings, while citizens of color who do the work of government are excluded.

As equal citizens and by virtue of your public promises we are entitled at your hands to freedom from discrimination, restriction, imputation and insult in government employ. Have you a "new freedom" for white Americans and a new slavery for your "Afro-American fellow citizens"? God forbid!

We have been delegated to ask you to issue an executive order against any and all segregation of government employes because of race and color, and to ask whether you will do so. We await your reply, that we may give it to the waiting citizens of the United States of African extraction.

Remarks by Wilson and a Dialogue

November 12, 1914

[Wilson:] Now let me see -- because, in the first place, let us leave politics out of it. If the colored people made a mistake in voting for me, they ought to correct it and vote against me if they think so. I don't want politics brought into this at all, because I think that lowers the whole level of the thing. I am not seeking office. God knows that any man that would seek the presidency of the United States is a fool for his pains. The burden is all but intolerable, and the things that I have to do are just as much as a human spirit can carry. So that I don't care the least in the world for the political considerations involved. I want you to understand that. But we are dealing with a human problem, not a political problem. It's a human problem.

Now, I think that I am perfectly safe in stating that the American people, as a whole, sincerely desire and wish to support, in every way they can, the advancement of the Negro race in America. They rejoice in the evidences of the really extraordinary advances that the race has made -- in its self-support, in its capacity for independent endeavor, it its adaptation for organization, and everything of that sort. All of that is
admirable and has the sympathy of the whole county.

But we are all practical men. We know that there is a point at which there is apt to be friction, and that is in the intercourse between the two races. Because, gentlemen, we must strip this thing of sentiment and look at the facts, because the facts will get the better of us whether we wish them to or not.

Now, in my view the best way to help the Negro in America is to help him with his independence -- to relieve him of his dependence upon the white element of our population, as he is relieving himself in splendid fashion. And the problem, as I have discussed it with my colleagues in the departments, is this, for I had taken it very seriously after my last interview with a committee of this organization. If you will leave with me all the instances you have just cited, I will look into them again. But the point that was put to me, in essence, was that they were seeking, not to put the Negro employees at a disadvantage, but they were seeking to make arrangements which would prevent any kind of friction between the white employees and the Negro employees.

Now, they may have been mistaken in judgment. But their objective was not to do what you gentlemen seem to assume -- to put the Negro employees at an uncomfortable disadvantage -- but to relieve the situation that does arise. We can't blink the fact, gentlemen, that it does arise when the two races are mixed.

Now, of course color outside is a perfectly artificial test. It is a race question. And color, so far as the proposition itself, is merely an evidence of the development from a particular continent; that is to say, from the African continent.

Now, it takes the world generations to outlive all its prejudices. Of course they are prejudices. They are prejudices which are embarrassing the Government of the United States just as much with other races, that is, some other races, as they are embarrassing us about the race that is derived from African decent. And so we must treat this thing with a recognition of its difficulties.

Now, I am perfectly willing to do anything that is just. I am not willing to do what may turn out to be unwise. Now, it is the unwise part that is debatable -- whether we have acted in a wise way or not. If my colleagues have dealt with me candidly -- and I think they have -- they have not intended to do an injustice. They have intended to remedy what they regarded as creating the possibility of friction, which they did not want ever to exist. They did not want any white man made uncomfortable by anything that any colored man did, or a colored man made uncomfortable by anything that a white man did in the offices of the government. That, in itself, is essentially how they feel -- that a man of either race should not make the other uncomfortable. It works both ways. A white man can make a colored man uncomfortable, as a colored man can make a white man uncomfortable if there is a prejudice existing between them. And it shouldn't be allowed on either end.

Now, what makes it look like discrimination is that the colored people are in a minority as compared with the white employees. Any minority looks as if it were discriminated against. But suppose that the Negroes were in the majority in the departments in the clerkships and this segregation occurred? Then it would look like discrimination against the whites, because it is always the minority that looks discriminated against, whereas the discrimination may not be intended against anybody, but for the benefit of both.

I am not deciding this question, you understand. I am only saying that everything that has been done is just. I have not inquired into it recently enough to be sure of that. But I want to get you gentlemen to understand this thing from the point of view of those who are trying to handle it. It is a very difficult question. Nobody can be cocksure about what should be done. I am not cocksure about what should be done. I am certain that I have been dependent upon the advice of the men who were in immediate contact with the problem in the several departments. They have assured me that they have not put Negro employees at a disadvantage in regard to rooms and lighting that was inconvenient. I have put that up to them again. I haven't had time to look at the conditions myself, but I have again and again said that the thing that would distress me most would be that they should select the colored people of the departments to be given bad light or bad ventilation yet worse than the others, and inferior positions, physically considered.
Now, they have not intended to do that, I am quite sure, from the assurances of many of the cabinet. It may be that some have been taking information from their subordinates without going to look at what was actually done. But, at any rate, that is the spirit of the heads of the departments, for I consulted with them very gravely about this, and I think their spirit is mine in the matter.

I want to help the colored people in every way I can, but there are some ways, some things that I could do myself that would hurt them more than it would help them.

Now, you may differ with me in judgment. It is going to take generations to work this thing out. And mark these pages, it will come quickest if these questions aren't raised. It will come quickest if you men go about the work of your race, if you will go about it and see that the race makes good and nobody can say that there is any kind of work that they can't do as well as anybody else.

That is the way to solve this thing. It is not a question of intrinsic equality, because we all have human souls. We are absolutely equal in that respect. It is just at the present a question of economic equality -- whether the Negro can do the same things with equal efficiency. Now, I think they are proving that they can. After they have proved it, a lot of things are going to solve themselves.

Now, that is the whole thing. We must not misunderstand one another in these things. We must not allow feelings to get the upper hands of our judgments. We must try to do what judgment demands now, as has been said to Mr. Trotter, I think you have the memoranda, and I will look into it again. I will look into it, and I accept the assurances that were given me, and I have repeated them to you. That is all I can do.

[Trotter:] May I ask one question, Mr. President? What do you think about the result of this present condition in the departments, where it has already operated to the detriment of so many of the employees, where some of them have been placed in a position where they are now humiliated and indisposed as a result of this humiliating condition: having to go so far from their work to the toilet rooms, and then the condition also where employees in the government have not only been reduced from clerkships to laborers, but have been forced right out of the departments entirely.

[Wilson:] I haven't known of such incidents. My question would be this: If you think that you gentlemen, as an organization, and all other Negro citizens of the country, that you are being humiliated, you will believe it. If you take it as a humiliation, which it is not intended as, and sow the seed of that impression all over the country, why the consequences will be very serious. But if you should take it in the spirit in which I have presented it to you, it wouldn't have serious consequences. Now, that is what I think about it. It is the misunderstanding, as I honestly believe it to be, that is going to be serious, much more serious than the facts justify.

Now, as for demotions and things of that sort, I haven't taken them up. I didn't know about that.

[An unknown person:] Mr. President, these colored clerks, and clerks of other nationalities, have been working together, side by side, in peace and harmony and friendship for fifty years without distinction and separation based upon their race. Mr. President, it is entirely untenable to say that race feeling or race friction necessitates any of this separation of Afro-American clerks. It is absolutely contrary to the facts of the case. Mr. Trotter has told you that, even under Democratic administration, it was not found to be necessary to separate the clerks.

[Trotter:] We are not here as wards. We are not here as dependents. We are not here looking for charity or help. We are here as full-fledged American citizens, vouchsafed equality of citizenship by the federal Constitution. Separation and distinction marking, because of a certain kind of blood in our veins, when it is not made against other different races, is something that must be a humiliation. It creates in the minds of others that there is something the matter with us -- that we are not their equals, that we are not their brothers, that we are so different that we cannot work at a desk beside them, that we cannot eat at a table beside them, that we cannot go into the dressing room where they go, that we cannot use a locker beside
them, that we cannot even go into a public toilet with them.

Think of it, Mr. President, that any pedestrian walking the streets of the national capital, whether he be white or black, can enter and use any of these public toilets in the government buildings, and that Americans of color who are doing the work of the government cannot do so.

Now, Mr. President, there cannot be any friction with regard to going into a public toilet. They have been going into the public toilets for fifty years. They were going into the public toilets when your administration came in. When your administration came in, under Mr. John Skelton Williams, a drastic segregation was put into effect almost at once.

Mr. President, we insist that the facts in the case bear us out in truth -- that this segregation is not due to any friction between the races, but is due to race prejudice on the part of the official who puts it into operation.

Mr. President, citizens, as they are picked out, especially in a country where there are many races and many nationalities -- and everyone is picked out to be subjected to a prejudice of theirs -- they are going to be subjected to all kinds of mistreatment and persecution everywhere throughout the country. They are necessarily objects of contempt and scorn, because segregation is not only a natural order of things, but it is the way of progression and more segregation. The very fact of any racial element of government employees being by themselves is an invitation in the public mind. That fact cannot be denied nor disputed.

Now, Mr. President, this is a very serious thing with us. We are sorely disappointed that you take the position that the separation itself is not wrong, is not injurious, is not rightly offensive to you. You hold us responsible for the feeling that the colored people of the country have -- that it is an insult and an injustice; but that is not in accord with the facts, Mr. President. We, if anything, lag behind. Why, Mr. President, two years ago among our people, and last year, you were thought to be perhaps the second Abraham Lincoln.

[Wilson:] Please leave me out. Let me say this, if you will, that if this organization wishes to approach me again, it must choose another spokesman. I have enjoyed listening to these other gentlemen. They have shown a spirit in the matter that I have appreciated, but your tone, sir offends me. You are an American citizen, as fully an American citizen as I am, but you are the only American citizen that has ever come into this office who has talked to me in a tone with a background of passion that was evident. Now, I want to say that if this association comes again, it must have another spokesman. You wouldn't do me, then, a possible injustice.

[Trotter:] I am from a part of the people, Mr. President.

[Wilson:] You have spoiled the whole cause for which you came.

[Trotter:] Mr. President, I am sorry for that. Mr. President, America that professes to be Christian cannot condemn that which [blank]

[Wilson:] I expect those who profess to be Christians to come to me in a Christian spirit.

[Trotter:] Mr. President, I have -- now, don't misunderstand me, I have not condemned the Christian spirit. I am pleading for simple justice. Mr. President, I am from a part of the people who will take me at my word. I am from a part of the people. If my tone has seemed so contentious, why my tone has been misunderstood. I am from a part of the people, and I would like to be able to say, and do so, [that you are] without prejudice.

[Wilson:] Please leave me out and argue the case.

[Trotter:] I was simply trying to show how my people feel, Mr. President, because it is the truth that we who led in this movement are today, among our people, branded as traitors to our race on segregation.
[Wilson:] As traitors to your race?

[Trotter:] As traitors to our race, because we advised the colored people to support the ticket. That is the reason we do it. I am sincere in this feeling. I want to show, Mr. President, their feeling in the matter, not my feeling. I am telling you the truth. We ought to be truthful, Mr. President. We ought to be frank and truthful. I hope you want to be frank and true and not be false to your faith. Now, Mr. President, you know it would be an unmanly thing to appear to be false.

[Wilson:] These other gentlemen are not --

[Trotter:] Believe me because I have been in the midst, and I work in this cause. And we have tried to get the colored people to reason in this matter. Their feeling is more [intense on this matter] than on others. Any portrayal, we found, led them to resent this thing. No, Mr. President, that is God's earnest truth, that we are as we seem to be, Mr. President -- that we cannot be respected by our fellow citizens if we are to be segregated by the federal government. Our plea to you, Mr. President, from the bottom of my heart, is not to have the federal government make concessions to the prejudices of anybody.

We grew up in this country, and we know these various racial elements -- the Latin, the Slavic, the Oriental, the differences, the conglomeration of races. And when they look around, they find we are treated differently from the way they are treated. I have given my life to this work of trying to relieve [the lot of] our people. God knows I want to relieve it, but I am trying to find the right way.

Mr. President, my whole desire is to let you know the truth we know. We see how it is impossible to make you feel what this thing is like, which injures. And they feel alienated by bringing any kind of separation in the public service. Because, Mr. President, it has been taken as an example in our every turn of our daily lives, in every turn of it. The government employees, if it were possible to have a separation without humiliation -- if that position is adopted outside these limits -- then for us, you know this, if that is the position that is adopted, it is going to be inconceivable for colored clerks to concur with that separation.

There are great dangers, Mr. President, far more than there are advantages. We of course -- of course, we do feel that there is a political aspect of the case, because, you know, we felt that there might be a question about this thing, and you know that we went on your declaration and things that you said. And, as I say, we are simply asking that conditions obtain that have obtained before. We would be false, Mr. President, false to ourselves and false to you, if we went out and led you to believe that we could convince the colored people that there was anything but degradation.

[Wilson:] I don't think it's degradation. That is your interpretation of it.

[Trotter:] Mr. President, as for your expression about having the two races work together without the dissatisfaction of either party, I want just to ask this question: If I am appointed to a government position, and a white man is in the same office, and either one becomes dissatisfied with the other, without any reason for it, should either be considered? Should it not be ignored simply as a dispute? Unless all those things occur in the abstract.

[Wilson:] That is, if you do the work being done. If you harm the one, you are doing an injury to the other. It seems to me that is the situation.

Well, I am very much obliged to you. I will look into it again.

[Trotter:] Mr. President, I hope that you don't feel toward me as you did a little while ago. I think you made a mistake. I assume great responsibility in the whole matter.

[Wilson:] But that part we must leave out. Politics must be left out, because, don't you see, to put it plainly, that is a form of blackmail. I am only saying that you are conscious of that, or that you would tell me contrary to that. But you must reflect that, when you call upon an officer and say you can't get certain
votes if you don't do certain things, that is the kind of course which ought never to be attempted. I would resent it from one set of men as from another. You can vote as you please, provided I am perfectly sure that I am doing the right thing at the right time.

[Trotter:] Just one word, Mr. President. We were trying to bring about racial harmony throughout the country.

Introduction

One year before, when William Trotter had addressed President Wilson about segregationist policies in Washington, D.C. for the first time. Trotter had seemed to accept the President's assurances that he would investigate and resolve the discriminatory practices (see Document 11). Front-page coverage by the nation's newspaper of record of the second, less cordial meeting of the two men highlighted the racial tensions Belle La Follette had been reporting in *La Follette's* for over a year. The account emphasized the meeting's confrontational nature and Wilson's angry dismissal of Trotter and his delegation.

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**PRESIDENT RESENTS NEGRO'S CRITICISM**

Refuses to be Cross-Questioned About Racial Segregation in Government Offices.

STANDS BY HIS POLICY

"Two Years Ago You Were Thought to be a Second Lincoln," Said Equal Rights Spokesman.

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*Special to the New York Times.*

WASHINGTON, Nov. 12--Segregation of white and negro civil service employees in Government departments, a system inaugurated during the present Administration, is to be continued. President Wilson made clear his views on the subject today when he received a delegation representing the National Independence Equal Rights League. The President resented the attitude of the spokesman, William Monroe Trotter, of Boston, who was quoted as having attempted to cross-examine Mr. Wilson, when the President explained that the question was not a political one, and that he would not be influenced in his decision by the threats of the league to oppose the Democratic Party.

President Wilson informed the delegation that never since he had been in office had he been addressed in such an insulting fashion. He said that if at any time in the future he should consent to receive representatives of the league, that body would have to designate another spokesman. After the interview, which had been scheduled for fifteen minutes, had continued for nearly an hour, the President rebuked Trotter for the aggressiveness of his attitude and dismissed the delegation.

The President said the policy of segregation had been enforced for the comfort and the best interests of both races in order to overcome friction. He made it clear that he had endeavored in every way to assist the negro race toward its independent development, and assured the delegation that he would gladly investigate any individual cases of discrimination which they might from time to time present to him. The problem, he
said, was one which had no place in politics.

**Talks of Negro Bolt.**

When the President had concluded his remarks, Trotter stepped forward and began questioning Mr. Wilson. He suggested that unless the Administration abandoned the segregation policy the Democratic Party could expect the united opposition of the negro voters in 1916. He charged that the Administration had been influenced in its decision by Secretary McAdoo, Postmaster General Buleson, and John Skelton Williams, Controller of the Currency.

"Two years ago," said Trotter, "you were thought to be a second Abraham Lincoln" -- the President tried to interrupt, asking that personalities be left out of the discussion. Trotter continued to speak, and the President finally told him that if the organization he represented wished to approach him again it must choose another spokesman, adding that he had enjoyed listening to the other members of the committee, but that Trotter's tone was offensive.

Here Trotter denied that he had any passion, but the President told him he had spoiled the cause for which he had come and said he expected those who professed to be Christians to come to him in a Christian spirit.

Trotter continued to argue that he was merely trying to show how the negro race felt, and asserted that he and others were now being branded as traitors to their race because they advised the colored people "to support the ticket."

This mention of votes caused Mr. Wilson to say that politics must be left out, because it was a form of blackmail. He said he would resent it as quickly from one set of men as from another, and that his auditors could vote as they pleased, it mattered little to him, so long as he was sure he was doing the right thing and at the right time.

The President spoke frankly saying that if the colored people had made a mistake in voting for him they ought to correct it, but that he would insist that politics should not be brought into the question because it was not a political problem. With some emotion he asserted he was not seeking office, and that a man who sought the office of the Presidency was a fool for his pains. He spoke of the intolerable burden of the office and of things which he had to do which were more than the human spirit could carry.

**Merely a Human Problem**

Emphasizing that he did not care in the least for the political considerations involved, Mr. Wilson urged that he wanted his auditors to understand that it was a human problem and not a political problem. While the American people wanted to support the advancement of the negro, the President was sure that as practical men everybody knew that there was a point at which friction is apt to occur. The question must be stripped of sentiment and viewed in its fact, because the facts got the better of the individual whether one desired it or not.

Trotter then led the way from the President's office. Once outside Trotter said:

"What the President told us was entirely disappointing. His statement that segregation was intended to prevent racial friction is not supported by facts. For fifty years negro and white employees have worked together in the Government departments in Washington. It was not until the present Administration came in that segregation was drastically introduced, and only because of the racial prejudices of John Skelton Williams, Secretary McAdoo and Postmaster General Burleson."

Others in the delegation included the Rev. Byron Gunner, of Hillburn, N.Y., President of the league: Thomas Walker, Chairman of the Washington branch of the league: M.W. Spencer, of Wilmington, Del., the Rev. E.E. Ricks, and F. Morris Murray, of Virginia.
As the delegation was leaving the White House, Trotter announced that a mass meeting would be held next Sunday at the Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church in Washington to protest against the attitude of the Administration.

**Introduction**

*The Nation* contributed to La Follette's campaign to expose Wilson's racism when it criticized the president strongly for his inability to grasp the true meaning of segregation and injustice, despite the negative publicity surrounding Trotter's behavior during his visit to the White House the week before.

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Bad manners are bound to hurt even a good cause, and the last place where disrespect is to be tolerated is the White House. If William Monroe Trotter was, as appears, insolent to Mr. Wilson last week, he has impaired his advocacy of the rights of the colored people and hurt them all as well. But Mr. Wilson, we feel, should make allowances, not perhaps for the hasty temper of a man whose passionate desire for justice for his race often leads him astray, but because of the genuine wrongs of which Mr. Trotter complains. It is a sad blot upon the Wilson Administration that it has tolerated, nay, drawn the color line, without real cause, save, as Mr. Trotter truthfully put it, the racial antipathies of Messrs. Burleson, John Skelton Williams, and McAdoo.[A] For an Administration which talks about a New Freedom and boasts of having bestowed a new liberty upon business men, not only to be blind to the wrongs of full ten millions of American citizens, but to add to them is truly discouraging. Mr. Wilson can feel keenly for the governmental wrongs of the "submerged 85 per cent" of the people of Mexico, of whom so many are Indians and of a mixed parentage, but he has yet to say a really sympathetic word about the wrongs of the millions in the South who are without voice in their own government.

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The difficulty lies, of course, in putting yourself in the other fellow's place, in having some appreciation of what it means to be the victim of prejudice and injustice, to be wronged without the power to remedy the wrong. That Mr. Wilson is unable to visualize this is, we repeat, the more disappointing because there are so many injured persons with whom he does sympathize so understandingly. His unusual vision and imagination leave him, however, when it comes to permitting his subordinates to inflict indignities upon American citizens in the immediate vicinity of the White House. If he could only have been one of the submerged 10 per cent. of our people in Washington for forty-eight hours he could never have palliated the wrong done, as he is reported to have done, by saying that segregation was enforced for the comfort and best interests of both races, in order to overcome friction. He would know then that it makes neither for the comfort nor for the best interests of the races, but invariably leads to added friction and creates deep and lasting unhappiness among the segregated. This problem has vexed him and caused him heartache more than once in his Administration, and it will not cease to plague him until he lays down the law that sets up equality of treatment of all employees in the Government service.

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A. Postmaster General Albert S. Burleson first proposed introducing segregation in the Railway Mail Service at a cabinet meeting on 11 April 1913. Assistant Secretary of the Treasury John Skelton Williams ordered segregated toilet facilities in the Treasury Department. William McAdoo, Secretary of the Treasury, did not countermand Williams's order, and believed with Wilson that segregation was the best method to avoid possible racial friction.

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Introduction

Like *The Nation*, *The New Republic* strongly criticized Wilson's handling of his meeting with Trotter. This editorial portrayed the president as condoning racism in his administration, failing to keep his campaign promises to African Americans, and remaining steadfastly insensitive to their concerns.

**PRESIDENT WILSON** did not appear at his best in his recent conference with the delegation which appealed to him in behalf of the negroes in the Government service. If, as is alleged, Mr. William Monroe Trotter of Boston, the spokesman of the committee, was guilty of an impropriety in making a reply to the President, then the President might well have used his discretion as to whether a rebuke was in order. But it does not seem obviously appropriate for the President of the United States to complain of the "intolerable burden" of his own office to negroes who daily suffer burdens more intolerable, who come to the President with real grievances due to the President's own inaction in a moral crisis. The President waives aside all references to considerations of political support by negroes as "blackmail," but the President before his election sought that support, and sought it with explicit promises which negroes and others believe have not been kept. "Should I become President of the United States," he said during the campaign of 1912, "they [the colored people] may count upon me for absolute fair dealing and for everything by which I could assist in advancing the interest of their race in the United States." What the President has yet done in advancing this interest he does not state: what he intends to do in the future he does not state. But he does express his unwillingness to interfere with Southern members of his Cabinet, who are segregating colored employees, setting apart Federal civil servants with negro blood in them as though they were lepers, a humiliation which is bitterly resented by colored people throughout the country and deplored by thousands of high-minded white people, yet one which the President finds words to condone. The President used fair words in 1912 in his appeal to the negroes for votes. We know now that those words meant nothing.
Introduction

Belle La Follette of course commented on Trotter's meeting with Wilson (see Document 19) in her column. She dismissed Wilson's defense of segregation, once again pointing out that segregation of government employees denied African Americans fundamental rights.

Segregation in the Civil Service

THE question of race segregation in the United States Civil Service was again brought to public attention when a delegation called on President Wilson, recently, to protest against it in certain departments. Newspaper reports say that the President resented the attitude of the spokesman because he threatened political reprisal. If there was cause for offense it was unfortunate.

But if it is true, as reported, that the President took the position that the Departments should be allowed to segregate the races because race prejudice was with us and segregation would prevent friction, that too was unfortunate.

The United States government is in a very different position from the private employer. A civil service examination is open to all citizens alike. The law is carefully drawn to prevent partiality or discrimination among applicants.

The colored people constitute about one-tenth of our population. They hold about that proportion of places in the United States government civil service. They have won these positions absolutely on merit. What becomes of the fundamental principles of our institutions if the color line or any other arbitrary line can be drawn by the government among its civil service employees?

**Introduction**

Fifteen years after her first "Colored Folk of Washington" column appeared, La Follette wrote this rather wistful article for *La Follette's Magazine*. Segregation had not disappeared in Washington, and La Follette once again emphasized the unreasonableness of the segregationist stance by pointing out conditions in the city.

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**Segregation in Washington**

IT happens that our apartment fronts on Sixteenth Street, the broad thoroughfare which leads north from the White House past Henderson Castle, the French Embassy, Mrs. Marshall Field's residence and many other imposing homes. It is a beautiful street, but the traffic is becoming more and more crowded. There is an almost constant whir of automobiles and busses. Fortunately the room where I sleep and work is in the back of the apartment and I am not disturbed by the noises of the street.

However, I am often awakened in the early hours of the morning by noises long familiar to me that have pleasant associations, which I don't mind so much as I do the usual city noises -- the crowing of roosters, the sound of the lawn mower, of the hoe and the sickle and occasionally of the hammer and the saw. I think I must be dreaming; but no, as I look out, there are my neighbors already at work in their back yards. They are making garden, tending to their flowers, fixing their grape arbors, repairing their porches, painting their fences; the more enterprising women may have already started to hang out their wash. I am reminded of a neighbor of my childhood days whose great ambition it was to get her washing all on the line Monday mornings before any of the other farmers' wives in sight had even begun to hang out clothes.

But this is not the country; it is the heart of the down-town residential section of the nation's Capital. I recall when I first came to Washington the part of town where we now reside was quite far out -- rather new. Since then long rows of houses whose back yards interest me have been built and occupied by well to do people, who, as happens in all cities in their growth and expansion, have moved farther out, their places being taken by another element of society.

In the great business cities, as I understand it, like New York and Chicago, this new element which supplants the old in decadent houses is apt to be of the disorderly and disreputable kind. Not so in Washington, where the tendency is for the most prosperous colored people to get possession of these older houses. Naturally they take pride in their location; their disposition is to improve and beautify their homes; they get up early in the morning before going to their day's work to dig and plant and hang out the wash.

When I came to Washington forty years ago the contrasts in residences were even more striking than now. It was not uncommon then to see the pretentious mansions of the rich being built on the fashionable streets next to the small frame houses whose colored owners, it may be presumed, would not part with them at any price. Strange as it may seem, in the course of years, some of the grand houses that I saw built have been razed to the ground, while a few of the old Negro landmarks remain.

In the course of these evolutionary changes it happens that in the down-town part of the city some colored people still live in the midst of fashion, but more generally they are just around the corner from it. Turning either to the right or left of Sixteenth Street, on "S", "T", "U", "V", and some other streets, you will find rows of houses like those my windows look upon, occupied entirely by colored people.

There is prejudice and feeling, there are laws and restrictions, and long drawn out litigation on the subject of segregation here in Washington, as elsewhere in the country. Nevertheless there are thousands and
thousands of white and colored citizens of the District of Columbia living in the proximity I have described without harm and for the most part quite unconsciously.

Belle Case La Follette
Image 1: Portrait of Belle Case La Follette, c. 1910, Wisconsin Historical Society, WHi-10736.

Belle Case La Follette at about the time she was writing columns in her family's magazine to combat federal segregation efforts.
Image 2: Belle Case La Follette Addressing Farmers, 1915, Wisconsin Historical Society, WHi-2415.

Belle Case La Follette on the stump for woman suffrage in Blue Mounds, Wisconsin, 1915
Image 3: Mr. and Mrs. Robert La Follette, Sr., 1925, Wisconsin Historical Society, WHi-10739.

A Progressive Partnership: The La Follettes in 1925, after thirty-four years of marriage.
How Did Belle La Follette Oppose Racial Segregation in Washington, D.C., 1913-1914?

Endnotes


7. For more on Belle La Follette's feminist transformation, see Nancy C. Unger, "Two Worlds of Belle Case..."


10. See Unger, "Two Worlds."


13. See also the widely reprinted protest from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to Woodrow Wilson, 15 August 1913, printed in Link, *Papers of Wilson*, vol. 28, pp. 163-65.

14. La Follette followed up the case in her next week's column. See Belle Case La Follette, "Miss Murraye's Dismissal," *La Follette's Magazine*, 30 August 1913, p. 6.


17. See Christine A. Lunardini, "Standing Firm: William Monroe Trotter's Meetings With Woodrow Wilson, 1913-1914," *Journal of Negro History*, 64 (Summer 1979): 244-64. See also Stephen R. Fox, *The

18. For information on the telegram from the Northeastern Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, see Papers of Wilson, vol. 28, p. 290, note 1. For the editorial published in the Lexington Herald, see Papers of Wilson, vol. 28, p. 290, note 3.


How Did Belle La Follette Oppose Racial Segregation in Washington, D.C., 1913-1914?

Bibliography


A biography of African-American activist and Boston Guardian editor William Monroe Trotter.


This complimentary biography is the only full-length, published study of Belle La Follette, providing an overview of both personal and political aspects of her life.


Much correspondence concerning the Wilson administration's attempt to segregate the federal government can be found in volumes 28-31 of this very well annotated and indexed collection of Wilson's papers.


In their overview of thirty years of segregation in the federal government, Meier and Rudwick place the efforts of the Wilson administration in historical perspective.


Montgomery's dissertation emphasizes the political rather than personal in La Follette's life. It includes much material on La Follette's dedication to furthering rights for women and minorities.


Unger's biography, the most recent of progressive giant Robert M. La Follette, includes a chapter on Belle La Follette, her political activism, including her fight against segregation, and her relationship with her husband. The La Follette marriage is addressed throughout the book, and a chapter focuses on the couple's four children.


This journal article traces La Follette's shift from defining her role as one of supporter of her husband and children to a more independent and assertive activist for a host of political causes. It emphasizes La Follette's struggles, both personal and political, and features a large number of photographs.

Unger, Nancy. ""When Women Condemn the Whole Race': Belle Case La Follette Attacks the Color Line."

A narrative account of La Follette's attacks on the color line, which were carried out primarily through her columns in the family magazine.


This videotape features many still photographs of La Follette, with excerpts from her speeches and letters read by an actor.


Weisberger presents a fond perspective, primarily on the activism of Belle La Follette and her daughter, Fola, on behalf of women.


Weiss investigates the relationship between party politics and African Americans during the Wilsonian segregation crisis, and examines why liberals were unsuccessful in extending the boundaries of Progressivism to people of color.
How Did Belle La Follette Oppose Racial Segregation in Washington, D.C., 1913-1914?

Project Credits

- Wisconsin Historical Society
- Library of Congress
  Woodrow Wilson Papers
- Houghton Library, Harvard University
- Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University
How Did Belle La Follette Oppose Racial Segregation in Washington, D.C., 1913-1914?

Related Links

**The La Follettes of Wisconsin**

This illustrated chronology includes several photographs of Belle La Follette and provides a brief history of the family's involvement in politics.

**National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Timeline**

The website of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People includes this detailed timeline tracing the history and accomplishments of the organization.

**Pioneers in the Law: Belle Case La Follette**

This webpage offers a biographical sketch of Belle La Follette, highlighting her political activism.

**Robert Marion La Follette**

Although this website focuses primarily on the life of Robert La Follette, it also includes some photographs of Belle Case La Follette.

**William Monroe Trotter**

This biographical sketch of William Monroe Trotter maintained at Bridgewater State College includes a portrait of Trotter and several related links.

**Priscilla Ruth MacDougall, "Wisconsin's Women Lawyers--Past and Present."**

This excerpt from a longer article about the history of women in the legal profession in Wisconsin features Belle La Follette in photographs and text. Reprinted from *Wisconsin Academy Review* (1975).

**Woodrow Wilson--The Last Confederate**

This illustrated narrative traces Wilson's racial attitudes and actions and includes links to additional resources on the topic.