



IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

**HARRY S.  
TRUMAN**

---

1951-1952

## **Memorandum of Disapproval of Bill Requiring Segregation in Certain Schools on Federal Property, November 2**

“I am withholding my approval of H. R. 5411, a bill to amend Public Laws No. 815 and 874 of the 81st Congress with respect to schools in critical defense housing areas and for other purposes.

“The basic purpose of this bill is meritorious. It would provide for the construction, maintenance, and operation of elementary and secondary schools in those localities where defense activities of the Federal Government have created unusual burdens. Thus, the bill would complete the plan of Federal assistance now operating under the Defense Housing and Community Facilities and Services Act of September 1951. In addition, it contains perfecting amendments which would improve the administration of an established program supporting the operation of local school facilities where they are inadequate to meet the impact of expanded defense activities.

“Unfortunately, however, the Congress has included one provision in this bill which I cannot approve. This provision would require a group of schools on Federal property which are now operating successfully on an integrated level to be segregated. It would do so by requiring Federal schools on military bases and other Federal property to conform to the laws of the States in which such installations are located. This is a departure from the provisions of Public Laws 815 and 874, which required only that the education provided under these circumstances should be comparable to the education available to other children in the State. The purpose of the proposed change is clearly to require that schools operated solely by the Federal Government on Federally-owned land, if located in any of seventeen States, shall be operated on a segregated basis ‘to the maximum extent practicable

“This proposal, if enacted into law, would constitute a backward step in the efforts of the Federal Government to extend equal rights and opportunities to all our people. During the past few years, we have made rapid progress toward equal treatment and opportunity in those activities of the Federal Government where we have a direct responsibility to follow national rather than local interpretations of non-discrimination. Two outstanding examples are the Federal civil service and our armed forces, where important advances have been made toward equalizing treatment and opportunity.

“Not every school operated on a Federal reservation has been integrated. It is never our purpose to insist on integration without considering pertinent local factors, but it is the duty of the Federal Government to move forward in such locations and in such fields of activity as seem best and appropriate under individual conditions and circumstances.

“We have assumed a role of world leadership in seeking to unite people of great cultural and racial diversity for the purpose of resisting aggression, protecting their mutual security and advancing their own economic and political development. We should not impair our moral position by enacting a law that requires a discrimination based on race. Step by step we are discarding old discriminations, we must not adopt new ones.

“I believe the way is open for an effective administration of Public Laws 815 and 874 of the 81st Congress, while the present Congress reconsiders the full implications of the amendments proposed in H. R. 5411. The objectionable provision was added during the closing days of the first session without the careful consideration necessary for such an important departure from national policy. I hope the Congress early in the next session will reconsider this matter carefully and will re-enact legislation to provide the school aid urgently required in critical defense housing areas without the objectionable provision of H R 5411 ”



Children in the Talladega Springs School for Negroes, Talladega, Alabama. Sent by W. Hardin Hughes, Professor of Sociology, Department of Sociology, Talladega College, Alabama. All are unidentified. ca. 1948. White House Central Files: Official File, Harry S. Truman Library & Museum. Photograph. Accession 59-1623-03. <https://www.trumanlibrary.org>.

Truman, “Memorandum of Disapproval of Bill Requiring Segregation in Certain Schools on Federal Property,” 11/2/51. ” Peters and Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=13983>.

### **Statement by the President on Establishing the Committee on Government Contract Compliance, December 3**

“I have today signed an Executive order creating the Committee on Government Contract Compliance.[i]

“The purpose of this order is to secure better compliance by contractors and sub-contractors with certain provisions now required in their contracts with the U. S. Government. For nearly 10 years it has been mandatory to include in such contracts a clause obligating the contractor to practice nondiscrimination in the performance of his contract. The clause specifically forbids discrimination because of race, creed, color, or national origin; relates to the various aspects of employment; and extends to sub-contracts as well as to original contracts.

“The inclusion of this nondiscrimination clause in Government contracts has been helpful in reducing the practice of discrimination. In the past, however, compliance has not been secured by any system of uniform regulation or inspection, common to all the contracting agencies of the Federal Government, and widely understood by contractors and their employees.

[i] See below Executive Order 10308.

“The present order is designed to correct this deficiency. It places the primary responsibility for securing compliance with the nondiscrimination clause with the head of each contracting agency of the Federal Government. This is as it should be, for this is where the primary responsibility rests for securing compliance with contractual provisions generally. The same means used to obtain compliance generally can be used by the contracting agencies to obtain compliance with the nondiscrimination clause. The Committee will be expected to examine and study the compliance procedures now in use and to recommend to the department and agency heads changes that will strengthen them. As part of its functions, the Committee may confer with interested persons. Recommendations of this Committee are subject to review under certain conditions by the Director of Defense Mobilization, so that our efforts towards eliminating discrimination in employment will at all times aid in increasing defense production.

“The creation of the Committee on Government Contract Compliance is one more step in the program I have undertaken to use the powers conferred on the Executive by the Constitution and the statutes to eliminate the practice of discrimination in connection with activities of the Federal Government. The Fair Employment Board of the Civil Service Commission carries this responsibility with respect to the Federal Government as an employer. The President’s Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services pointed the way toward ending discrimination in our fighting forces. In fulfilling a contract with the Federal Government a contractor should follow the national policy of equal treatment and opportunity. It is my hope and my belief that the Committee on Government Contract Compliance will show us the way.

**Executive Order 10308—Improving the Means for Obtaining Compliance with the Nondiscrimination Provisions of Federal Contracts, December 3**

“WHEREAS existing Executive Orders require the contracting agencies of the United States Government to include in their contracts a provisions obligating the contractor not to discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, color, creed or national origin and obligating him to include a similar provision in all subcontracts; and

“WHEREAS it is necessary and desirable to improve the means for obtaining compliance with such nondiscrimination provisions;

“NOW, THEREFORE, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and statutes, and as President of the United States, including the authority conferred by the Defense Production Act of 1950, as amended, and pursuant to the authority conferred by and subject to the provisions of section 214 of the act of May 3, 1945, 59 Stat. 134 (31 U. S. C. 691), it is ordered as follows:

“SECTION 1. The head of each contracting agency of the Government of the United States shall be primarily responsible for obtaining compliance by any contractor or subcontractor with the said nondiscrimination provisions of any contract ordered into, amended, or modified by his agency and of any subcontract thereunder, and shall take appropriate measures to bring about the said compliance.



This is a political cartoon by Jim Berryman entitled "I'm betting that Ike can't ride 'im!". President Harry S. Truman is attempting to put a saddle on a dinosaur labeled "G.O.P. Old Guard." Published in the Washington Evening Star. ca. 1952. Harry S. Truman Library & Museum. Photograph. Accession 59-1623-03. <https://www.trumanlibrary.org>.

“SEC. 2. There is hereby established the Committee on Government Contract Compliance, hereinafter referred to as the Committee. The Committee shall be composed of eleven members as follows:

(a) One representative of each of the following named agencies (hereinafter referred to as the participating agencies: The Department of Defense, the Department of Labor, the Atomic Energy Commission, the General Services Administration, and the Defense Materials Procurement Agency.

(b) Six other members, who shall be designated by the President.

“The Committee shall have a chairman and a vice-chairman, both of whom shall be designated by the President from among its members.



“SEC. 3. The Committee is authorized on behalf of the President to examine and study the rules, procedures, and practices of the contracting agencies of the Government as they relate to obtaining compliance with Government contract provisions prohibiting the discrimination referred to above in order to determine in what respects such rules, procedures, and practices may be strengthened and improved. The Committee shall confer and advise with the appropriate officers of the various contracting agencies and with other persons concerned with a view toward the prevention and elimination of such discrimination, and may make to the said officers recommendations which in the judgment of the Committee will prevent or eliminate discrimination. When deemed necessary by the Committee it may submit any of these recommendations of the Director of Defense Mobilization, and the Director shall, when he deems it appropriate, forward such recommendations to the President, accompanied by the statement of his views as to the relationship thereof to the mobilization effort. The Committee shall establish such rules as may be necessary for the performance of its functions under this order.

“SEC. 4. All contracting agencies of the Government are authorized and directed to cooperate with the Committee and to the extent permitted by law, to furnish the Committee such information and assistance as it may require in the performance of its functions under this order. The participating agencies shall defray such necessary expenses of the Committee as may be authorized by law, including section 214 of the act of May 3, 1945, 59 Stat. 134 (31U. SC. 691).



USA 200

1952

## President's Commencement Address at Howard University, June 13

“I wish I could say to you who are graduating today that no opportunity to use your skills and knowledge would ever be denied you. I can say this: I know what it means not to have opportunity. I wasn't able to go to college at all. I had to stay at home and work on the family farm. You have been able to get the college education that is so important to everyone in this country. Some of us are denied opportunity for economic reasons. Others are denied opportunity because of racial prejudice and discrimination. I want to see things worked out so that everyone who is capable of it receives a good education. I want to see everyone have a chance to put his education to good use, without unfair discrimination.

“Our country is founded on the proposition that all men are created equal. This means that they should be equal before the law. They should enjoy equal political rights. And they should have equal opportunities for education, employment, and decent living conditions. This is our belief, and we know it is right. We know it is morally right. And we have proved, by experience, that the more we practice this belief, the stronger, more vigorous, and happier our Nation becomes.

“That is why, six years ago, I created the President's Committee on Civil Rights. Nearly five years have passed since this Committee made its report to me and to the whole American people. Today, I want to talk about some of the progress that has been made in those five years.

“Back in 1947, a good many people advised me not to raise this whole question of civil rights. They said it would only make things worse. But you can’t cure a moral problem, or a social problem, by ignoring it.

“It is no service to the country to turn away from the hard problems—to ignore injustice and human suffering. It is simply not the American way of doing things. Of course, there are always a lot of people whose motto is ‘Don’t rock the boat.’ They are so afraid of rocking the boat that they stop rowing. We can never get ahead that way. We can only drift with the current and finally go over the falls into oblivion with nothing accomplished.

“If something is wrong, the thing to do is to dig it out, find why it is wrong, and take sensible steps to put it right. We are all Americans together, and we can solve our hard problems together, including the problem of race relations.

“The experience of the last five years demonstrates clearly that this is true. Now, instead of making things worse, our efforts in the field of civil rights have made things better—better in all aspects of our national life, and in all parts of our country. One of my southern friends said to me the other day, ‘The last five years are the best years in race relations this country has ever had.’ And the record proves it...

“The civil rights report and the civil rights program give voice and expression to this great change of sentiment. They are the necessary instrument of progress. They are the trumpet blast outside the walls of Jericho—the crumbling walls of prejudice.

“And their work is not yet done. We still have a long way to go. “I should like to turn to the record now, and speak of the progress that has been made, and the tasks that still await us.

“First, in the field of political rights. In the last five years, two more States, Tennessee and South Carolina, have abolished the poll tax. Now there are only five poll tax states where there were eleven not so long ago.

“Opportunities for all our citizens to participate in our political life have increased steadily and rapidly. Court decisions have given protection to the right of equal participation in primary elections.

This is a photograph of a political cartoon regarding civil rights and the 1948 election by Clifford Berryman. The cartoon depicts "Miss Democracy" saying "You Mean You'd Rather be Right Than President?" President Harry S. Truman is standing on a rug labeled "Civil Rights" and is saying "I Stand Pat!" The original of the cartoon is inscribed: "To the President with Cordial and Hearty Good Wishes. C.K. Berryman Washington Star March 14, 1948." March 14, 1948. Harry S. Truman Library & Museum. Photograph. Accession 60-336. <https://www.trumanlibrary.org>.



“Second, let us take the field of education. I am glad to say that the principle of no discrimination—the principle that has always been followed here at Howard University—is the law of this country today in institutions of higher learning supported by public funds. Since the court decisions outlawing discrimination, more than a thousand Negro graduate and professional students have been accepted by ten State universities that were closed to Negroes before. In the last five years, legislation has been passed in ten other states to abolish segregation or discrimination in schools and colleges.

“And the gloomy prophecies of the opponents of civil rights have not been fulfilled. The universities have not been deserted. On the contrary, the faculties and students of the universities which are now open to all have welcomed and accepted the new students on their merits as individuals.

“This is only one instance of the way educational opportunities have been opening up to Negroes in recent years. Since 1930 the enrollment of Negro college students has gone up eight times. Just stop and think what that means. For every 100 Negro college students enrolled in 1930 there are 800 today.

“We have begun to make progress in public housing also. In 1950, 177 public housing projects were freely opened to families of all races and creeds. This is eight times as many eight years ago. In the last few years nine States and eight cities have forbidden discrimination or segregation in public housing.

“Another problem is that of protecting the right to safety and security of the person. There is no more important duty of the Government. We must protect our citizens from mob violence. And here again we have been moving forward.

“In the last five years two States have enacted anti-lynching laws, and four States and six cities have passed laws against wearing masks in public. The Civil Rights Section of the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation have used their powers to reinforce the State and local law enforcement agencies. The latest instance was in Illinois, where the State Governor[i] stopped an outbreak of mob violence and the Federal authorities brought to justice the local law enforcement officers who abetted the mob...

“Now I want to speak of something that gives me considerable pride. That is the progress in fair employment in the Federal service.

“If there is any place where fair employment practices ought to prevail, it is the Federal Government. But experience shows that the departments and agencies of the Federal Government, no less than other organizations, need to be helped and encouraged. Sometimes they need to be compelled. In 1948, I set up a Fair Employment Board in the Civil Service Commission. This Board has gone about its task quietly and effectively, and has done a great deal to insure the success of our nondiscrimination policy.

[i] Adlai E. Stevenson (1900-65), would later be the Democratic presidential nominee in the 1952 and 1956 primary elections, losing both times to General Dwight D. Eisenhower. For more on the 1951 incident in Cicero, Illinois when World War II veteran and bus driver Harvey E. Clark, Jr. (1920-98) attempted to move his family into an all-white neighborhood, resulting in riots, see Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, 390-93; Abrams, *Forbidden Neighbors*, 103-119.

“The Federal Government makes billions of dollars worth of contracts every year to buy the things it needs. The money to pay for these contracts comes from all the people, without discrimination. It should be spent in the same way—without discrimination. For over ten years we have had a policy that every Government contract must contain a clause binding the contractor and his subcontractors to practice nondiscrimination. But it is not always easy to be sure that such a clause is being followed in practice. To meet that situation, I set up a Committee on Government Contract Compliance last year. It is the duty of that Committee to work with the contracting agencies and to help them get better compliance with the rule of nondiscrimination.

“States and cities have also been going ahead to see that their fair employment practices are followed in their jurisdictions. In the last few years eleven States and twenty municipalities have adopted fair employment laws. Unions and employers in many places have voluntarily done away with the color bar. And the results have been peaceful and beneficial. None of the disorder that was so freely predicted has taken place.

“Some of the greatest progress of all has been made in the armed services. Service in the armed forces of our country is both a duty and a right of citizenship. Every man or woman who enters one of our services is certainly entitled to equal treatment and equal opportunity.

“There has been a lot of talk about the need for segregation in the armed services. Some of our greatest generals have said that our forces had to have segregated units. But experience has proved that this is just plain nonsense.



“Quite some time ago, the Navy and the Air Force eliminated all racial distinctions, and the Army has been moving step by step toward this goal. For over two years every soldier into a training unit has been assigned on a basis of individual merit without racial discrimination. In the Far East, when General Ridgway took command,[ii] he ordered the progressive integration of all the troops in his command, and you have seen the results in the wonderful performance of our troops in Korea. Only recently a similar order was issued by the European Command at the direction of the Secretary of the Army. From Tokyo to Heidelberg these orders have gone out that will make our fighting forces a more perfect instrument of democratic defense.

“All these matters have been taken care of in a quiet and orderly way. The prophets of doom have been proved wrong. The civil rights program has not weakened our country—it has made our country stronger. It has not made us less united—it has made us more united.

“The progress we have made so far is a source of deep satisfaction to us all. But that does not mean we have reached the goal or that we can stop working. Much remains to be done.

[ii] General Matthew B. Ridgway (1895-1993) succeeded General Douglas MacArthur as Supreme United Nations and United States Commander in Korea.

“Voluntary action can carry us a long way, and we must encourage it. State and local legislation is necessary, and we must have it. But let us remember this. The President’s Committee on Civil Rights led the way. The debate over the civil rights program has stimulated much of the progress over the past five years. We still need the legislation I recommended to the Congress in 1948. Only two of the recommendations in my civil rights program have been adopted so far. I shall continue, in office and out, to urge the Congress to adopt the remainder.

“I am not one of those who feel that we can leave these matters up to the States alone, or that we can rely solely on the efforts of men of good will. Our Federal Government must live up to the ideals professed in the Declaration of Independence and the duties imposed upon it by the Constitution. The full force and power of the Federal Government must stand behind the protection of rights guaranteed in the Federal Constitution. ”