

ROOKS, MILTON P.

April 27, 1948

Mr. Milton P Rooks
1135 Pierce Street
Clearwater, Florida

Dear Mr. Rooks:

I was very pleased to have seen you at the State Teachers Association in Tampa recently and I again want to comment you for the fine job which you are doing in encouraging the members of our group to take an active part in the political affairs of the state.

As I indicated to you I have not personally endorsed any candidates for any state office since I believe that the president of a college such as ours should make every effort to be free of political entanglements. I know several of the candidates who are running for office and I have found all of them to be at some time or other quite helpful to the program of our institution.

In connection with your request, I am sending you the enclosed memorandum which has been prepared by our Department of Social Sciences upon the request of several persons throughout the state and which we feel, because of the nature of your work should be helpful or suggestive to you at this time. We hope you will find it serviceable and if we can be of any further help in providing more detailed information or if you would like to have us to do any research in any particular area or on any particular phase of state government, please do not hesitate to call upon us for the same.

Sincerely yours,

Wm. H. Gray, Jr.

WHG:acbb

Enclosure

BACKGROUND DATA - CURRENT CIVIL RIGHTS PROBLEMS

MEMORANDUM

Many traditional patterns have been disturbed by the events leading to and resulting from the prosecution of World War II. Not the least of these patterns is that which traditionally has provided the blueprint for harmonious race relations in the south.

Current discussions of Civil Rights are reminiscent of the polemics that characterized the period following the Civil War. Person interested in historical parallels cannot forego the opportunity to compare these two significant periods in history.

Then, as now, there was considerable discussion of the status to be accorded members of a minority group. The minority group in question, then as now, was the American Negro. Significantly enough, the Negro is more a minority now than he was then. Yet, the problem growing out of the present situation has world-wide import.

At that time, because of the newness of the Negro as a legal personality, legislation was considered the practical necessity to effect the acceptance of the Negro as a full-fledged citizen. Further, because of the longstanding controversy centering about the Negro in his previous status as a chattel slave, it was considered a blot on the civilization to which he belonged to change his status. The war had been fought ostensibly as a result of the efforts of partisan groups to control the destiny of this group which then, as now, accounted for the menial labor supply of a social organization that boasted a hierarchy of social classes.

In the struggle that resulted, more lives were lost, and more physical damage was wrought to property than in any other martial effort to which the United States has been a party. Just as the Bill of Rights had been added to the constitution as a means of providing a specific type of protection, so the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments were added with certain definite objectives in mind. Simply stated, the 13th amendment freed Negroes from involuntary servitude; the 14th amendment protected his civil rights to the extent that he was to receive legal redress and relief from laws enacted by states which impinged on him; the 15th amendment safeguarded his right to vote.

The 14th amendment augurs a solemn warning to present advocates of legislation as a panacea for the ills that are so apparent in Race Relations. While primarily adopted to protect a special group, it has through the medium of judicial interpretation been used to further interests and to accomplish things never envisioned.

① The soul of America is exposed to the astigmatic gaze of a hungry, insecure, distrusting, disillusioned, cynical "outside world." ~~These are in the words of Thomas Paine's "the times that try men's souls." And who are they whose souls are tried? That is where you and I come in.~~ One of the fundamental assumptions upon which all that we as Americans

hold dear is that there is a sacredness of personality, and the intrinsic worth of that personality is to be realized only insofar as there is the shouldering of the responsibility for contributing to the well-being of the society of which we are a part. This then, constitutes a challenge to those who are living in the throes of inter-racial tension. And whether we like it or not, ours is a state of tension.

What with the present political alignments resulting from opposition, real and feigned, that springing from adherence to principle and position born in political expediency, the irony of our present position is appalling. But if there is a diabolical attribute of the human personality, it is its capacity for rationalizing conflicting personality traits. Only this could explain our adherence to our constitutional rights to circumscribe the rights of others even as we assert our rights.

But this is a part of the ideology that undergirds the life of the south. Recognizing that this is the case, what hope then is held out for removing these tension spots? All that we know about human behavior seems to indicate that human beings everywhere are motivated by fundamentally the same stimuli. It stands to reason then that when a group in a society is accorded a definite status in which its activity is circumscribed, then it too develops an ideology which rebels at what the dominant society has defined as injustice. This ideology makes for distrust^{of} suggestions however well-meaning for gradual acceptance, when the history of minority groups in America shows clearly that resentment toward, and fear of, aversion to differences are not overcome in isolation, but rather are accentuated, giving prejudice a more specific basis.

While this is a description of the ideological implications of the present inter-racial tension, it is in my thinking not the most important consideration of this hour. The idea that this is in truth, one world, makes inter-group cleavage of any kind the beginning of a social irritant which the overcoming of which makes such inroads on the resources of this country, that not only is its position of influence in jeopardy, but its existence as a nation stands to be placed in peril.