

Collier's

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Can Eisenhower End Segregation in Washington?

By HOWARD WHITMAN

A "sympathetic" atmosphere has been established in the administration to help fulfill a key Presidential pledge. One result: the first Negro secretary ever to be employed by the White House. But what's the atmosphere now in theaters, restaurants and the City Fire Department?



Roughly one of every three persons in the capital is a Negro. The races mingle freely on downtown streets. The traditional sources of tension are jobs, housing, and schools.

"I propose to use whatever authority exists in the office of the President to end segregation in the District of Columbia. . . ."

President Dwight D. Eisenhower in his State of the Union message, February 2, 1953

WHETHER Ike knew it or not, he put his finger, in those 21 measured words, on the sorest point in his new home town. Washington is 35 per cent Negro. It lies athwart the civil-rights battle lines, an enclave over which both North and South are struggling to impose their racial patterns. "It is a Southern city!" shout the proponents of segregation, pointing out that Washington is, indeed, below Mason and Dixon's line.

"It is an all-American city!" countershout the opponents of segregation, demanding that the national capital be a living paragon of democracy—its showcase.

I heard hotel men and movie owners say they would sooner go out of business than see their doors opened to blacks as well as whites. I heard a real-estate operator warn, "If they break the race barrier this will become a black city, an all-black city." I even heard dire predictions of riot and bloodshed.

This is the hot potato President Eisenhower has grabbed with both hands.

"Oh, don't worry about Ike. He won't do anything," a prominent District of Columbia Republican said to me. "Didn't you notice how he phrased it in the State of the Union message. He said he'd use 'whatever authority exists in the office of the President'—he's no dummy! He knows he hasn't got any authority to end segregation here."

A spokesman for Washington's Board of Trade remarked, "In this town we're used to Presidential pronouncements that nothing ever happens to."

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Plain Words in Campaign Interview

Eisenhower had not only laid it on the line in his State of the Union message; he had sprinkled his campaign speeches with antisegregation promises and on one occasion, in Cleveland, went out of his way to say to reporters: "Possibly I should have been a bit more specific. I believe we should eliminate every vestige of segregation in the District of Columbia."

After the President had been settled in his new home long enough to start implementing his promises, I called at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue and went over the segregation issue with one of his official family.

"What we have here is a sympathetic atmosphere on the race question," the White House spokesman said. "We aren't going to have one special man to handle minorities the way they did before (a reference to administrative assistant David K. Niles under Presidents Roosevelt and Truman). We don't want to handle minorities as though they were problem children.

"Our approach is for everyone here to share in the idea. We want to begin our fight against segregation right here at home—with little things."

He picked up a telephone, and presently into the White House conference room walked Mrs. Lois Lippman, a young Negro woman from Boston. "I'd like you to meet the first Negro secretary ever to be employed in the White House," he said proudly.

Mrs. Lippman works in the office of Sherman Adams, assistant to the President. She has five stenographers and secretaries working under her, all of them white.

"How do you like living in Washington? Does the segregation bother you?" I asked her.

"I go to the places where I'm supposed to go and stay away from the places where I'm not supposed to go," she replied.

"How can you always know, being new here?"

"Oh, I clipped a list from a Negro newspaper. It shows the restaurants and movies where Negroes are permitted to go," she answered softly.

After she left, the White House spokesman continued, "The best way to break down segregation is not necessarily through legislation. Many people say, 'Let's rush and pass a law.' But President Eisenhower's idea is, 'Let's do it'—in other words, let's break down segregation by *breaking down segregation*. It's his own idea."

It was a troubled city that Eisenhower moved to last January. The segregation issue had been boiling up to a climax since the close of World War II.



Lincoln playground is for Negro children. Almost all of city's 141 recreation areas are segregated

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Washington's Engine Company No. 4 is one of five Negro fire companies. Forty-four are all white

In 1947, a Presidential committee headed by Charles E. Wilson, then president of the General Electric Company, called the situation "intolerable . . . a graphic illustration of a failure of democracy." In 1948, the National Committee on Segregation in the nation's capital called it a "blot on our nation." In the 1952 elections, both Democrats and Republicans adopted platform pledges to clean up racism in Washington.

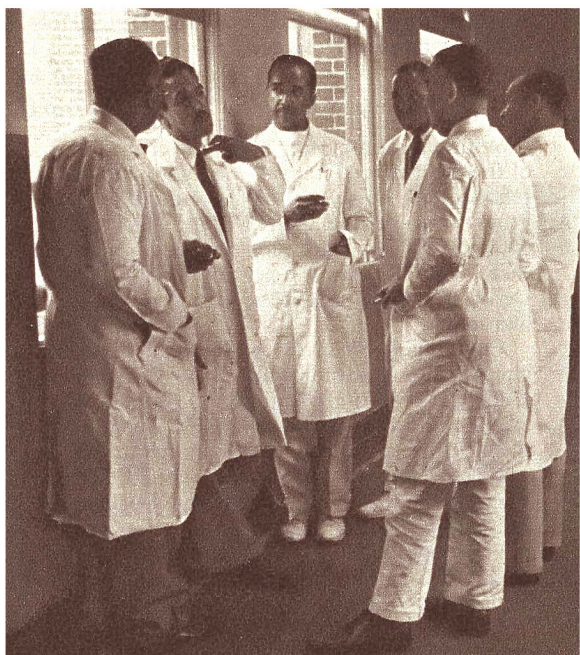
Then along came Ike. He moved in with his 802,178 black and white neighbors to find a Washington in which:

Negro and white public-school children were required to go to separate schools.

More than 2,100 "white" restaurants and lunch counters (out of 2,200 in Washington) refused to serve Negroes.

Negroes were not admitted to any of the large downtown movies. (Of Washington's 62 movie theaters, 40 barred Negroes entirely, four art theaters admitted all comers, and 18 theaters in Negro neighborhoods were attended almost entirely by Negroes though whites were not barred.)

Some hotels had 100 per cent Negro exclusion, some admitted Negroes to banquets and meetings



Negro doctors chat in Freedmen's Hospital—only one in city where they can have staff facilities



Mrs. Lois Lippman, the first Negro secretary ever employed in the White House, talks over some work with aid Sheila Tunney. Mrs. Lippman has five clerical assistants under her.

of organizations, some permitted Negroes to occupy rooms if arrangements had been made by the State Department (example: Negro foreign diplomats) and some had a quota system for Negroes coming to Washington for predominantly white conventions.

Of Washington's 141 recreation areas for children and families, 105 were for white only or for colored only.

Hospitals with the exception of Freedmen's, a hospital used almost exclusively by Negroes, had segregated wards; shelters for the destitute also were segregated; and St. Elizabeths, the mental hospital, was segregated; even the District of Columbia jail was segregated.

Two Crucial Cases for Supreme Court

Within a month after Eisenhower moved in, two of the most crucial items—segregation in the public schools and the refusal of restaurants to serve Negroes—were in the United States Supreme Court. The school case had been bulked in with similar cases from Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia and Delaware. The restaurant case was Washington's own baby.

On January 27, 1950, the Reverend W. H. Jernagin, a Negro minister who is now chairman of the National Fraternal Council of Churches, walked into Thompson's Cafeteria on Fourteenth Street in the northwest section of Washington. With him were Mrs. Geneva Brown, a Negro officer of the United Cafeteria and Restaurant Workers Union; Dr. Mary Church Terrell, Negro educator and former member of the District of Columbia Board of Education; and a white man, David Hutchinson Scull, a Quaker.

"I took a tray from the pile of trays," the Reverend Mr. Jernagin recounted. "I then placed the tray on the rail in front of the counters with food. I took a portion of cake from the food counter and placed it on my tray.

"I had moved about twelve or fifteen feet from the beginning of the food counters when I was stopped by a man in a white uniform who identified himself as the manager of the restaurant. He told me that I could not be served and could not eat in the restaurant.

"I asked the manager why I could not be served, and he replied, 'Because we don't serve colored people here. It is against the laws of the District of Columbia and against public policy.'"

Mrs. Brown spoke up, "There is no such law."

The manager, inasmuch as Mrs. Brown's statement was correct, replied, "Well, it is the management's policy not to serve Negroes."

"The company is refusing to serve me merely because my face is black?" asked the Reverend Mr. Jernagin.

"Yes, that is why," said the manager. "Individually, I have nothing against you—but the com-

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pany will not allow it."

Dr. Terrell, a woman now eighty-nine, born the year of the Emancipation Proclamation, asked, "Do you mean to tell me that you are not going to serve me? Isn't Washington in the United States—and doesn't the United States Constitution apply here?"

"We don't vote here," the manager answered. He apologized once more that it was not his fault, and the Reverend Mr. Jernagin and his friends put down their trays and departed.

Thus began a test case to see whether the District of Columbia's "lost laws" of 1872 and 1873 had any validity. These laws were enacted when Washington was governed by a Legislative Assembly set up by Congress (instead of being governed as it is today by Congress itself and three commissioners named by the President). The laws of 1872 and 1873 made it a penal offense for the owner of a restaurant in the District of Columbia to refuse to serve a person because of race or color.

Lawyers have had a field day pecking through the archives and balancing themselves on the points of constitutional pins to determine whether these laws were valid in the first place and, if so, whether they still are valid. On the pivotal question of whether Washington restaurateurs can be compelled today to serve Negroes, the "lost laws" have been held invalid by the municipal court, valid by the municipal court of appeals, invalid by the United States Court of Appeals, and—one month to the day after Eisenhower's inauguration—were pushed up to the United States Supreme Court.

Regardless of the Supreme Court decision, the Eisenhower administration showed its feeling in the matter when, on March 10th, Attorney General Herbert Brownell, Jr., filed a friend-of-the-court brief favoring the "lost laws" and thus opposing segregation in Washington's eating places.

"Eisenhower was definitely behind Brownell's move, which plainly shows that the administration is on the side of nonsegregation," a White House spokesman insisted. Another indication of the President's attitude was his recent announcement that by September segregation will be ended in the only Army-operated school where it now exists, Fort Benning, Georgia.

Bitter Accusations by Segregationist

For his pains, the President was accused by Georgia Representative James C. Davis, a powerful champion of segregation in the House District of Columbia Committee, of "appeasing radicals to get votes" and trying "to outdeal the New Deal."

The segregation issue is a slippery one, as Eisenhower soon will find out, if he hasn't already. There is more to it than meets the eye.

"Capital Transit will not hire Negro operators," the champions of civil rights protest.

The statement, so far as it goes, is true. The Capital Transit Company, which operates street-cars and busses in Washington, doesn't have a single Negro among its 2,300 operators—nor will it hire any. Why? Is the company race conscious, bigoted, un-American?

I put the question point-blank to J. A. B. Broadwater, president of Capital Transit.

"We have no objection to Negro operators on race grounds, none whatever," he said.

"Then why don't you hire any?" I asked.

"We did," he replied. "We tried it some years ago. We hired several Negroes to be operators and had them in training. Then we put the first one out on the line and what happened? The white operators refused to work."

A check back to the precise facts of the case revealed the following: Capital Transit had a group of Negro operators in training early in 1943. On February 3d, the first Negro to complete his training, a man named Simmons, was put out to work on the Benning line, a line since discontinued. But the white conductor on the car to which Simmons

The administration has gone on record in court against segregation in restaurants

was assigned refused to instruct him. As word spread that a Negro was on the line, other white operators refused to man their cars. One operator walked out of his car and left it standing on the main line. Fifty-eight white employees refused to work, bringing on a stoppage of transportation on the division for several hours—until the Negro operator was withdrawn.

What about that?

I turned next to Walter J. Bierwagen, president of the union to which Capital Transit operators belong, the Amalgamated Association of Street Electric Railway and Motor Coach Employees of America, AFL, Division 689.

“Well,” Bierwagen replied, “that work stoppage was not by union action. It was strictly a spontaneous demonstration. It started, it blossomed out—wham!”

“You mean then that the trouble is not so much with the company as with the white workers who won’t work with a Negro?” I asked.

“I can appreciate the company’s position,” said Bierwagen.

“But I thought a union like yours would be fighting discrimination,” I pressed

“We don’t discriminate, we’re against it,” said Bierwagen, adding after a pause, “but we haven’t gone to bat on it.”

Actually the union and the transit company did try to iron out the situation after 1943. A sociologist was engaged to make a confidential survey of the attitudes of white operators. He went to their homes. His report was described to me as “so hot it never was released.” Its conclusion: if a Negro operator were assigned to a line, service would stop.

And there the situation stands.

The union president acknowledges, “We haven’t gone to bat on it.”

The company president insists, “I should not do anything that would cause a work stoppage. I don’t think my job is to start a social revolution but to provide transportation.”

The Washington Fire Department is another sore spot. It is segregated. Negro fire fighters are confined to five companies while the remaining 44 companies are kept entirely white.

Protests by Fire Chiefs

Fire Chief Millard H. Sutton and his predecessor, Joseph A. Mayhew, both have considered segregation a drag on the fire department’s efficiency and openly have called for an end to it. F. Joseph Donohue, as district commissioner, insisted, “White and Negro fire fighters fight the same fires—there is no segregation of hazards. Segregation of firemen, paid from public funds, who are risking their lives in your interest and mine, is not only un-American, it is unconscionable.”

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In the autumn of 1951, the Board of Commissioners, upon the fire chief's recommendation, actually approved a plan to stop segregation and distribute Negro firemen in companies where they would do the most good. It never has been carried out. Chief Mayhew, who fathered the plan, was stopped cold when he tried to put it into effect. Sutton, who became chief in February, 1952, has been similarly stymied for over a year.

"My hands are tied," Sutton told me from his sickbed at Casualty Hospital (he was injured in an explosion in January).

Who ties his hands?

One of Washington's firemen is Sergeant William Waldenmaier. He is president of the Firemen's Association of the District of Columbia, which is Local 36 of the International Association of Fire Fighters, AFL. Speaking for his union, Waldenmaier said:

"I'll tell you who insists on segregation—we do, the men do! Right now we have five white officers in the colored companies. That's as much integration as we want—in fact more. We want it to stay as it is."

"Why?" I asked.

"Firemen have to live, eat and sleep in their firehouses. We simply do not want to live closely with Negroes," Waldenmaier responded. "We don't want them in the same enginehouse with us."

That Waldenmaier spoke accurately for the great majority of white firemen is attested by ballot. In June, 1951, white members of the Firemen's Association voted 664 to 9 in favor of segregation. (All 26 Negro firemen who took part in the election voted against segregation.) Last October, another vote was taken when Commissioner Donohue appeared personally before Local 36 to make an antisegregation plea, his last before submitting his resignation to Eisenhower. He was received sullenly: no applause when he spoke, applause when he left. The vote: in favor of segregation 190 to 3.

It has frequently been pointed out that segregation practices, especially in Washington, embarrass the United States in its dealings with the rest of the world and fill the propaganda hoppers of the Communists.

Waldenmaier's answer to this is at least direct: "They tell us this is bad for the rest of the world. We don't give a damn what happens over there. We want to keep them (the Negroes) out of here."

Segregationist firemen are not alone in their battle. They are amply supported by Southern segregationist congressmen, particularly those on the powerful House District of Columbia Committee, which is, in effect, Washington's city council.

"We've got a wonderful friend in Congressman James G. Davis (a member of the House District of Columbia Committee)," Waldenmaier said. "If I hear about someone scheming to end segregation, I just run to him and tell him about it. I don't know what club he uses, but whatever it is, it works."

Since the District of Columbia Com-

When Negroes moved on one street, 67 whites sold their homes

mittees of House and Senate virtually govern Washington, there is never any lack of clubs—including the power to cut off money to a recalcitrant city department.

Segregation in real estate, confining the Negroes to certain parts of town, was dealt a hard blow by the United States Supreme Court when it outlawed restrictive covenants in 1948. The non-white population of Washington swelled from 188,765 to 284,313 in the decade of the 1940s, an increase of 50 per cent. Negroes even before the court decision had moved far into the predominantly white northwest area, out Thirteenth and Sixteenth Streets to Spring Road, three miles north of the White House. The court decision facilitated further dispersion. By now, Negroes have bought homes five miles north of the White House and are taking up residence in the formerly all-white Crestwood and Petworth sections.

Washington has had plenty of neighborhood hysteria, as many another city has had, when Negroes first "broke a block" and For Sale signs popped up in front of white houses like dandelions the next morning. Adams Street, a little street near the Soldiers' Home, was "broken" in 1949. It runs only two blocks. But fleeing whites sold out 67 homes on those two blocks. There were hot tempers and grumbling but actually little to justify the oft-voiced fears of toppling real-estate values. Homes which had been bought for \$6,000 to \$7,000 (albeit on a lower market) were sold to their new occupants for \$16,000 to \$18,000.

What has happened to Washington, as to most cities since the end of World War II, has been a rush of families from city to country. The "Washingtonian" you meet today is likely to live in neighboring Maryland or Virginia. While the population of Washington itself is 802,178, the population of the metropolitan area is 1,464,089.

Social and economic pressures, if not "gentlemen's agreement" restrictions, have kept Negroes almost entirely out of the pleasant suburban purlieus. Thus they have piled up in the city, "infiltrating," as some Washingtonians put it, into more and more neighborhoods. This result would seem to be inevitable: could they be shut out of the new areas without piling up in the old?

Realtor "Views with Alarm"

Rufus S. Lusk, Washington's real-estate mentor, is alarmed by the trend. He is president of the Washington Tax-

D. C. segregation has so many aspects, Ike must beware of booby traps

payers Association and publisher of the District of Columbia Real Estate Directory. "This is going to become a Negro city. I said it twenty years ago—and I still say it. The Negroes are infiltrating all over town," Lusk declared. He doesn't like it one little bit.

"What has this done to the real-estate business?" I asked.

"Hasn't hurt it at all. The market's very active," he replied. "That is—for the time being. In the long run, well, after all, colored people haven't as much money as white people."

Georgetown, Washington's most historic and probably most charming residential section, is an exception to the pattern of Negro influx. It has an intellectual, cosmopolitan population with little prejudice against Negroes. Here the nonwhite population, instead of rising, has sharply dropped, from 3,258 in 1940 to 1,915 in 1950. One reason is the rise in realty values.

Another was given by a Georgetown resident (a Mississippi-born woman, by the way) who explained it this way: "Here, we don't mind Negroes a bit. All we want is good neighbors, whether black or white. So you see, we don't get panicky and sell out. In other neighborhoods, Negroes flood in simply because panicky white people dump their homes on the market."

President Eisenhower must expect last-ditch opposition—if he really intends to "eliminate every vestige of segregation in the District of Columbia"—from Washington's organization of white neighborhood groups known as the Federation of Citizens' Associations. The leading spokesman and past president of the federation, Clifford H. Newell, not only espouses segregation personally but insists that it is part and parcel of American principles.

"Antis" Called Un-American

"The only people in Washington who oppose segregation are about 5 per cent who are superliberals, people inclined to be socialistic, working in collusion with Negroes," Newell asserted, "and about 3 per cent who oppose it from the Christian standpoint. Both these groups are misled and misguided." He has characterized the anti-segregationists as "unscrupulous agitators," "un-American . . . plotters," and "schemers . . . in the name of social democracy, which is but another name for Communism."

The terrain is, as I said, tricky, and even one so agile in the field as Eisenhower may easily be tripped up. He and Mamie already have had a couple of close calls.

In February, just a month after they moved into the White House, one of Washington's big downtown movie houses, Keith's Theatre, ran a picture called *Never Wave at a Wac*. Word got

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around that Mamie was planning to attend. Promptly a spokesman for a Negro group got on the phone to the White House and wanted to know (1) did Mrs. Eisenhower know that Keith's Theatre barred Negroes, and (2) would she patronize such a theater, thereby implying approval of its Jim Crow policy?

Mamie did not go.

In March, Ike narrowly missed a booby trap when he was looking over a list of candidates for judgeships submitted by the District of Columbia Bar Association. Ordinarily, such bar-association recommendations are of the highest reliability, and Ike might have gone for this one without qualm; that is, until he was reminded that the District of Columbia Bar Association excludes Negro lawyers.

The terrain is tricky because Washington hasn't any consistent pattern of segregation. It is spotty, frequently surprising, often illogical. Ike might think of it as Normandy just after the invasion, when the territory was hashed up and you could never be sure who held what.

Though the District Bar Association is Jim Crow, the District Medical Society (since last year) admits Negroes. At one time, but no longer, the Daughters of the American Revolution barred Negroes from the stage of Constitution Hall, but permitted them in the audience, while the National Theatre barred Negroes from the audience and permitted them on the stage. When the District Recreation Board segregated the Rose Park Tennis Courts as a Negro area, it got bitter complaints; whites claimed they were discriminated against!

Ike will have to get used to the fact that the problem of his black and white neighbors is not all black and white. It is full of muddy grays. And there is no better place to find proof than in the famous rendezvous of Washington newspapermen, the National Press Club. It is not exactly a Jim Crow organization. It doesn't *bar* Negroes. But among its more than 4,000 members, including just about every kind of newspaperman, onetime newspaperman and news source, there just doesn't happen to be a Negro.

"Is this a coincidence?" I asked a member with long experience on the membership committee.

"There's no sense in fencing with you," he replied candidly. "This is Washington. This is a Jim Crow town. This club just doesn't take Negroes."

He continued, "I know Louis Lautier of the Atlanta Daily World (first Negro newspaperman to be admitted to the Capitol Press Galleries). He's as fine a fellow as you'd want to meet. I don't see any reason why he shouldn't be here in the club having lunch now."

Actually Lautier, or any other Negro, *can* have lunch at the Press Club, if a member wishes to bring him as a guest. Waiters have specific instructions to serve any guest of a member; in fact the instructions were made quite specific after Judge William Henry Hastie, then an aide to the Secretary of War and later governor of the Virgin Islands, was turned away without lunch



Louis L. Armistead

when a member brought him to the Press Club in 1942.

"This is a social club," explained Press Club President Theodore F. Koop when asked the reason for its all-white membership. The club chooses its own members. Two members sponsor a new man and 10 or more can exclude him by blackball. Since the South is heavily represented, members feel it would be suicidal to propose a Negro and no one ever does.

One member, though, did say to me, "I feel I am living a lie, believing one thing and belonging to a club that does something different."

Pressures on the President

Eisenhower will hear plenty of voices for segregation and plenty of voices against it; he will be nudged and goaded at every turn by the pressure groups. But assuming that he deeply holds to his belief that "every vestige of segregation" should be eliminated in the District of Columbia, he may want to take a stroll sometime and talk to a few people with no axes to grind.

It is just five minutes from the White House to the National Theatre, Washington's traditional home of the legitimate stage. Here segregation made one of its bitterest stands. The theater actually closed its doors in 1948, was dark for three months and then switched to movies rather than admit a single Negro to its audience. But today the National is offering stage plays again—and it admits Negroes.

Ike might want a word with pixylike Edmund Plohn, the manager. He was manager both before and after. "I don't know why we ever barred Negroes in the first place," Plohn says. "This town just puts pressure on you, and you've got to do what the others do. Now that we made the move, we're much happier. We have no difficulty at all, and we're doing fine."

I attended a performance at the National. The fine old theater had its usual audience of top-drawer Washingtonians, and in a row near me a Negro

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couple seemed to be enjoying the show.

A bit farther from the White House is the Dupont Theatre, an art movie house. It opened in 1948 and drew no color line, the first "white" theater to admit all comers. Reports Jean Imhoff, the manager: "People have it in their heads that if you raise the bars Negroes are going to just crowd in. They don't. Less than 10 per cent of our audiences were Negroes when we opened, and it's still less than 10 per cent. We did have to throw out a drunken man and woman recently, but they weren't Negroes. We haven't had trouble with a Negro patron in five years."

Finally, Eisenhower might want a visit with the Reverend A. Powell Davies, pastor of the All Souls' (Unitarian) Church. The second Sunday after Ike moved to Washington, when the restaurant issue was boiling to a climax, the Reverend Mr. Davies preached on Good Intentions. He ended up with:

"I shall myself, from this time on, not knowingly eat a meal in any restaurant in the District of Columbia that will not serve meals to Negroes . . . I invite all who truly believe in human brotherhood to do the same. We have talked long enough. It is time for action. If America is to be a righteous nation, worthy of the greatness of its opportunity, it must come through righteous deeds, not lofty talk. I challenge church members, who pray every Sunday, 'Thy will be done on earth,' to do God's will in race relations. If they do not care to do it, I respectfully suggest that they admit, however sorrowfully, that they are not Christians."

The Reverend Mr. Davies' church prepared a list of places in Washington which have abandoned segregation and hold all men to be equal. He'd certainly have a spare copy if the White House wanted one.

Collier's

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