

Interview

with WALTER WHITE

Secretary, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

WHAT NEGROES WANT NOW

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WHAT NEGROES WANT NOW

EDITOR'S NOTE: *What comes next, now that the Supreme Court has ruled separate schools for Negroes unconstitutional?*

Are all racial barriers going to fall? Will there be trouble in the South, perhaps violence?

These and similar questions are being asked as a result of the Supreme Court decision.

To get the Negro view of what lies ahead, a member of the Board of Editors of U. S. News & World Report interviewed Walter White, executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

WALTER WHITE for 36 years has been a leader in the fight for Negro equality. He became assistant secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1918, has been executive secretary since 1931.

It was the NAACP, with more than 300,000 Negro and white members, that carried the fight against school segregation to the Supreme Court.

Mr. White experienced race riots as a boy in Atlanta, Ga., later investigated many such riots, worked for antilynch laws. He has written several books, many articles on racial problems.

AT NEW YORK CITY

Q *What is the next move to be made in the long fight to end segregation, Mr. White? Now that you've won in education, what comes next?*

A Of course, our next task is that of seeing to it that there is full implementation of the Supreme Court decision.

Q *But won't the effects of the decision reach beyond the schools?*

A Now that the 58-year-old decision in Plessy vs. Ferguson [in which the Court held that separate facilities for Negroes are legal if equal] has been overruled, the new decision will apply not only directly to education, but indirectly also to other phases of human living.

Our next job is in the field of housing, in the field of employment, and in the expansion of the Negro's voting strength. Now let me make clear here that we do not favor bloc voting. But through no choice of his own, on issues like this, the Negro, whatever his economic status, has an understandable concern about human rights and civil rights and equal opportunities, and that Negro vote, both in the South and in the North, will continue to be interested in the job of completing the abolition of segregation.

Q *Do you think this school decision will contribute to breaking down other barriers between the races—social barriers?*

A Well, I don't want to be misunderstood on that. I'd like to make my position very clear, that I believe that friendship between two human beings is a matter which concerns those two individuals and nobody else. If, for example, as is unquestionably true, Gover-

nor Byrnes does not want to invite me to be his guest in the Governor's Mansion of South Carolina, certainly no law exists, and no law should ever exist, that requires him to do that. I might also feel that same way about inviting Governor Byrnes into my house, here in New York. But when you say "social barriers," I assume that you mean living as normal human beings in an enlightened society, and certainly I think it's going to have an effect.

Q *Do you think that the association of pupils in public schools could possibly lead to an increase in intermarriage between the races?*

A That could be true. When human beings get to know each other and to respect each other, friendships develop and some of those friendships develop into love and into marriage. But there has been no noticeable increase in such friendships in the States where there has been no segregation. I think it will not materially increase the number of such instances.

Q *Does the NAACP plan any legal challenges of some State laws which bar interracial marriages?*

A We've always opposed such laws on the basic ground that they do great harm to both races; they deny the women of a so-called minority group protection of their person, and it also is an improper and immoral thing to do. It really places a premium on extramarital relationships on both sides of the racial fence. If two people wish to live together, it is most un-Christian to say that they must live together in sin instead of holy wedlock.

Q *Do you then plan any further or immediate court tests of this issue as a result of this ruling?*

A No, we have no such plans.

Equality Sought in Housing, Jobs . . . Voting Strength To Be Expanded . . . No Action Planned on Marriage Laws

Q How about separate facilities in travel? They've been outlawed in interstate travel, but how about in intrastate travel? Are there still separate coaches in Southern States?

A In a number of Southern States that is still true. An action is now pending—the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People brought the action—against 17 Southern railroads, before the Interstate Commerce Commission, to insist that the Supreme Court decision dealing with segregation in travel be complied with. One very interesting thing is that in the South today, any part of it you visit, you will find that in chair cars, Pullman cars and dining cars there is no segregation—there has been no difficulty of any sort. With respect to plane travel, that also is true. But in the day coaches there continues to be segregation. Also, in a great many places that is going by the board, too, even in intrastate travel.

Q Has this Supreme Court ruling on schools any direct bearing on that matter?

A Not directly, but *Plessy vs. Ferguson* dealt with interstate railroad travel but soon was applied to other phases of life. We believe that this is going to happen in the present five cases in which the Supreme Court has just ruled—that it will affect relationships not only in schools but in other ways.

Q Do you plan to follow up with any specific court test on any specific phase of segregation?

A Do you mean with respect to schools?

Q No, with respect to such things as travel, entertainment, hotels, restaurants—

A There you have a variety of problems. On travel we can reach it with the Interstate Commerce Commission and through the courts. In the matter of hotels and restaurants, that is by and large a legislative problem along with the education of public opinion. You'd be surprised to know the instances in which changes of pattern have taken place in very recent years.

Only a few weeks ago I wrote a magazine article about the changes that have taken place in Washington, D.C., where two years ago even a man like Dr. Ralph Bunche, one of the great diplomats of our times, couldn't get a hotel room or couldn't go into a restaurant in Washington, outside of the Negro sections. Today, that barrier has been broken down. Negroes can stay at most of the hotels in Washington, virtually all of them, if they make reservations like anyone else, and they are treated with courtesy and there is no difficulty.



WALTER WHITE

Q Then you don't think any such court fight is necessary on those things as it was on the schools?

A Well, we will continue to utilize the guarantees of the Federal Constitution and of State constitutions and law to oppose any and all discrimination based on race or color.

Q What will be the international effect of America's abolishing school segregation?

A It will be one of the most important developments at this time. If I might bring in, for example, some of the experiences which I have had in other parts of the world. During the past 30 years or so I have traveled close to 2½ million miles in various parts of the world. I was a war correspondent during the late war in North Africa, the Middle East and the European and Pacific theaters of war. I traveled around the world, my wife and I, with the Town Meeting of the Air. We went to Europe and Asia and the Middle East, the Pacific and North Africa.

Wherever we went, among the questions asked—usually the first question—was this: "How can you Americans call your country a democracy as long as

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... "There may be some scraps between the youngsters"

question of dollars and cents for the moment, it's going to mean the narrowing of the wide chasm between whites and Negroes. They will learn to know each other and respect each other as human beings. I believe that in a relatively short time the South is going to wonder why there was all of this widespread discussion and all of this feeling about segregation.

VIOLENCE? SHORT-LIVED—

Q *You don't anticipate any serious trouble as a result of this decision?*

A I won't go quite that far. Unfortunately, some Southerners—and particularly men like Governor Herman Talmadge of Georgia—have said repeatedly that "blood will flow in the streets like rivers" should the Supreme Court outlaw segregation. Frankly, I don't believe it. Now, there may be some instances of friction that will be deliberately fomented by people who want to stop this growth toward an integrated society, but I believe that the authorities, both federal and State, will step in and nip in the bud any significant fomented violence that may be attempted.

Q *You do think that there might be violence?*

A There may be some, but I think it will be short-lived, and I don't think the instances will be numerous. Now, there may be some scraps between the youngsters, but even now there is friction among white children attending all-white schools and between Negro children attending all-Negro schools. I don't think there will be any measurable amount of friction, above what normally exists among healthy children. Today there are more than 2,000 young Negroes attending professional and graduate schools in Southern States. All except five States now admit Negroes. About four times that number attend summer schools, and there's never been a single bit of trouble.

Q *Won't there be some communities where Negroes themselves will voluntarily go along with continued segregation and raise no protest or legal issue?*

A I don't think so for a variety of reasons. Negroes themselves have long realized that their children are being denied equal education. This is true not only in the North and the cities of the South, but in the rural areas. What will be done is a continued campaign to wipe out every vestige of segregation not only in schools but in housing, which is equally important, in the matter of jobs, in the right to vote.

POWER OF 2 MILLION VOTES—

Q *On the question of voting, Mr. White, how strong is the Negro vote?*

A That brings me to one very important factor in this whole question which has been overlooked, namely, that the Negro today in the South is becoming an increasingly important political factor.

In the primary election in Alabama a few days ago, it was the Negro vote which re-elected John Sparkman as United States Senator. Now, Mr. Sparkman is an able, a sincere, a good man, but he has been very timorous on this issue of civil rights, and he has repeatedly made the statement that he favors the Southern position of continued segregation. But the record of his opponent, Congressman Laurie Battle, was so much worse than that of Senator Sparkman that between 50,000 and 60,000 Negroes in Alabama voted straight down the line for John Sparkman, if only as the lesser of two evils.

Today in the South there are close to 2 million registered Negro voters. When we won, after many, many years of litigation and attempted legislation, in 1944, the case of *Smith vs. Allwright*—in which the Supreme Court outlawed the barring of Negroes from the so-called White Democratic primaries in the South—there were less than 200,000 registered Negro voters in the South. By 1948 the number had increased to 750,000. In 1952 the number had jumped to 1,300,000.

And a quiet but steady campaign is now going on with the objective of 3 million registered Negro voters in the South by 1956. As a result, in many of the Southern States, as in the case cited in Alabama, the Negro vote holds the potential balance of power in a reasonably close election.

Q *Has this change been brought about entirely by the Negroes' own efforts?*

A It isn't the Negro alone who is doing this. The South has grown much more than most people realize. For example, no longer is it the No. 1 economic problem of the nation. It no longer depends on the one-crop system of cotton. There's been a tremendous industrial invasion in the South. They do not want to see this new prosperity shucked off. You have more young people, intelligent people, young men, for example, who fought in nonsegregated units in Korea.

There's also the factor of the efforts of the churches in the South, the labor unions, and other groups who now are beginning to realize that the Achilles heel of American foreign policy, as well as in the domestic policy, as was pointed out recently in Washington by Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, is the question of color in the United States.

These economic, these moral, these ethical, these international pressures are leading to a greatly changed psychology in the South. No longer can politicians be elected to office simply on a platform of "Keep the Negro down."

Q *You feel, then, that public opinion now is ready for this change?*

A Well, let me cite you the example of the Southern press. Long before this decision was handed down by the Supreme Court, virtually every newspaper in the

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... Evaders? "We'll take school officials into court"

South had already written editorials saying that the Court has ruled as it has, we must accept it because we believe in constitutional government; we're not going to give the Communists or other enemies of America any excuse for further deriding America and lowering American prestige in other parts of the world; let's be calm about it, let's be intelligent, and let's arrive at a peaceful, intelligent conclusion and program of action.

IN EFFECT LATE IN 1955—

Q *What is going to be the direct effect of this Supreme Court decision? Does this mean now that beginning next year there will be no more segregation in schools? Or will the change take years?*

A In a number of instances, in Delaware and Kansas, for example, they have already taken steps to eliminate segregation, and I think that will be true in many places in the South as well. But it won't take place generally next September, because in the decision handed down on May 17, the Supreme Court ordered arguments for the fall term in Court to determine what shall be the nature of the decree for implementation of the decision. So that those arguments will be held in the fall, and the decrees will be handed down probably sometime next winter, and it won't become effective until the school term beginning in the fall of 1955.

WHAT STATES WILL DO—

Q *Do you think that the Southern States that have made threats of defiance will actually resist the Court's decision?*

A I think that there will be some States which will attempt to use various tactics of delay. In South Carolina, for example, Governor Byrnes has asked and secured authorization in an election to abolish the public-school system rather than obey the Supreme Court—which is rather shocking coming from a man who has had so distinguished a career as Governor Byrnes has had, as a former Justice of the Supreme Court, a former Secretary of State, a former Assistant President, a man of very great distinction. But I don't think Mr. Byrnes really believes that he is going to be able to abolish the public-school system.

In the first place, a good many millions of dollars have been invested in education in South Carolina and in other Southern States. The people are not going to have that turned over to private individuals, private organizations, as he has suggested. Certainly they will not ask for the total abolition of education for whites as well as Negroes. Both white and Negro South Carolinians will certainly rise up in effective protest against it.

As for turning it over to private individuals, that is

one of the most harebrained proposals of current times. Because if they did turn education over to private individuals, with hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of public property, that would invite educational racketeers to debase standards, and you would see such corruption and such inefficiency that it would be unbearable. Then if the States should step in and take action to protect its children and its investment, it would come within the purview of the Supreme Court. So that I am sure that that is wholly a tactic of delay that is being attempted.

Q *Do you think any State actually will do away with public schools?*

A No.

Q *Will it be possible for some States or districts simply to ignore the decision and carry on, in effect, segregation in their own community?*

A They will attempt it. But I think public opinion has grown, if I may be immodest for a moment, in the 45-year effort of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People not only to secure legal decisions within the framework of the democratic process, but also to educate the public on the nature of the extent and injustice of discrimination which grows out of segregation. And certainly we shall continue to take every legal action which is necessary to insure complete compliance with the Supreme Court's decision.

NO ACTION? COURT ORDER—

Q *How will that decision be enforced? Who will police it?*

A If they attempt to evade the decision of the Court, then what we will do is to take such school officials into the federal district court, the circuit court of appeals, and eventually to the Supreme Court, probably on a show-cause order, to have them show cause to the federal court that they are complying with the decision.

Q *In carrying out this school desegregation order, what kind of decree will the NAACP seek from the Court?*

A We will ask the Court to issue a decree ordering the abolition forthwith of segregation. A great deal of time has been allowed by the Court already—there has been 91 years since the Emancipation Proclamation was signed by Abraham Lincoln—and we think that it is about time that the guarantees of the Emancipation Proclamation and the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments should be implemented. The South is more ready for the change from segregation to integration than professional politicians believe it to be.

Q *You think the change could be made quickly?*

A I think it could be made much more quickly than people think.

... "Negro is getting hand-me-down, secondhand housing"

Q Do you think that the end of segregation could come within a year; that is, within a year from next autumn?

A It can come, and I believe that in most instances it will come. There will be attempts at delays, but we do not believe they are going to be successful. And we shall oppose them.

HOUSING: A COMPLICATION—

Q Suppose we take the specific case of some Southern town about half Negro and half white, the races living in separate parts of the town, with Negro schools in one part and white schools in the other: How will desegregation be accomplished in a town like that?

A If there continues to be rigid housing segregation there won't be as rapid or as material alteration of the pattern of segregation at the grammar-school level.

Q It is possible, then, that almost entirely Negro schools could continue in such a town automatically because of the housing division?

A For the time being, yes.

Q That would be a natural consequence, rather than an artificial one?

A Yes. And the important factor in that connection is that one of the most enlightened of all social programs of the past 20 years has been federal, State and other aid to housing. Virtually every large American city, North as well as South, is ringed about with new housing developments, which have been constructed either with the aid of FHA [Federal Housing Administration] mortgage insurance, or through the Veterans' Administration or the HHFA [Housing and Home Finance Agency]. Many of those developments bar not only Negroes but members of other minorities. The Negro is getting a little better housing, but not to the extent of other Americans.

He is getting hand-me-down, secondhand housing in many instances, as the whites migrate out to the more modern suburbs—which, incidentally, is going to affect profoundly the political composition of the major American cities. Jews and Catholics have a tradition of remaining near their synagogues and churches. Negroes are still hemmed in by housing segregation, so that more and more so-called minorities are going to become increasingly powerful, so far as political control of the major American cities is concerned. I mean, for example, last year, Hulan Jack, a Negro businessman, was elected Borough President of Manhattan, and that was a logical development, because one third of the votes cast in the borough of Manhattan in the last election were cast by Negroes.

Q Do you think that the school ruling will contribute to the ending of housing segregation—in other

words, that mixed schools will lead to mixed residential areas?

A I think that it will affect not only housing but every department of American life.

BETTER EDUCATION—

Q Will the end of segregation really help Negro children get a better education?

A There is no doubt that that is true. Where you have had vast disparity in school equipment, in length of school terms, in the quality and quantity of education, it causes the Negro child to start out as an adult human being with at least one strike against him. The abolition of segregation is going to mean that to a greater extent than ever before in the history of the Negro in America he is going to have the basic training which is necessary to compete in an increasingly competitive world.

Q Could the end of separate schools possibly result in lowering the general level of education in any way?

A Experience has demonstrated just the opposite. It has meant higher standards, less money wasted on perpetuating a dual system of education. It has resulted in more education and better education for both whites and for Negroes.

Q It is anticipated, I suppose, that Negro teachers will now teach both white and Negro students, and vice versa?

A Yes.

Q Do you think that there is any danger that local boards will have a tendency to favor white teachers when it comes to employment?

A There will be attempts of that sort—in fact, we had one instance of it in Topeka, Kans., where, after the cases had been argued, six Negro teachers were notified that they would not be re-employed. But NAACP sent one of its attorneys there, and the matter was discussed and taken up, and then the school board found that public opinion in the community did not favor this attempt to penalize the Negro teachers, and they were rehired.

Q Probably you've been in contact since the Supreme Court school ruling with many Negro leaders—how do they feel about it?

A There is great jubilation.

Q Do you consider this as a major victory in your campaign for full equality?

A I think unquestionably it is the major victory to date. We haven't solved the problem yet. We still have a good many odds and ends, but I want to say this, that one somewhat overconfident individual telephoned me right after the Court handed down its decision, and he said, "The NAACP is on its way out of business." I said, "I would be delighted to see the NAACP go out of existence because it was no longer necessary for such an organization to exist."

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