

R.L. Vann to Ernest H. Wilkins, March 4, 1938. General Correspondence, Record Group 220: Records of the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services.

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PITTSBURGH COURIER

March 4, 1938

Dr. Ernest H. Wilkins, President
Oberlin College
Oberlin, Ohio

My dear Doctor Wilkins:

Although colored citizens have participated with honor and distinction in every war the United States has fought and died in the thousands that this grand Republic might live, they are today barred from virtually all service in our army and navy which they help support.

They are not permitted to serve in the air corps, the coast artillery corps, the tank corps, the engineer corps, the chemical warfare service, the field artillery, the signal or any of the other special services. They serve only in the infantry, cavalry, and to a small extent in the quartermaster and medical corps, and many of these supposedly combatant troops are assigned to duty as servants at army service schools. In the navy they are rigidly restricted to service as mess attendants.

Our army and navy are honeycombed with spies of alien extraction and connections who are easily able to enlist in our most vital services merely because they are white. No American Negro, soldier or civilian, has ever been suspected or convicted of betraying this country.

We do not believe that the thinking white people of this country are acquainted with this situation or would approve of it if they were. We are trying to have all branches of the army and navy opened to colored youth so that our nation may be certain of a trained reservoir of loyal, intelligent and dependable men. What is your view on this question?

Do you believe that all branches of the army and naval service should be opened to Negroes (they are over 99% native born)? Or do you think there should be an entire Negro division, including all arms of the service and officered at least in the line, by educated colored men, in the army; and a squadron completely manned by Negroes in the navy?

We feel this question is important at this time when the whole matter of national defense is uppermost in our minds and the dangers of fascism, nazism and communism are more real than ever before.

We shall appreciate a brief reply embodying your candid opinion on this question.

Yours very truly,
R. L. Vann, Editor

