

How President Wilson's Peers Opposed Racial Segregation in the Federal Government

By Leigh Walters

Late 1800s Civil Service Reforms

- ❖ Pendleton Civil Service Act of 1883
- ❖ Competitive Civil Service Exam
- ❖ Civil Service Commission
- ❖ By 1907, African American federal employees in D.C. had quadrupled, reaching about 2800.



Governor Wilson: 1912 Progressive Party & Democratic Presidential Candidate

“New Freedom” Campaign

❖ Lower tariffs

❖ Break up monopolies

❖ Fair labor practices

❖ Views on immigration

A DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE AND A NEW FREEDOM.: THIS IS THE FOURTH ...

WILSON, PRESIDENT WOODROW

Boston Daily Globe (1872-1922); Jun 8, 1913; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Boston Globe
pg. SM6

A DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE AND A NEW FREEDOM.

By PRESIDENT WOODROW WILSON

We stand in the presence of a revolution—not a bloody revolution; America is not given to the spilling of blood—but a silent revolution, whereby America will insist upon recovering in practice those ideas which she has always professed, upon securing a government devoted to the general and not to the special interests.

This is the Fourth of a Most Remarkable Series of Plain Talks to the Plain People Upon the Live, Important and Momentous Topics of the Greatest Interest to Every One—Rich and Poor, Old and Young

The originative part of America, the part of America that makes new enterprises, the part into which the ambitious and gifted workingman makes his way up, the class that saves, that plans, that organizes, that presently spreads its enterprises until they have a National scope and character—that middle class is being more and more squeezed out by the processes which we have been taught to call processes of prosperity. Its members are sharing prosperity, no doubt; but what alarms me is that they are not originating prosperity.

No country can afford to have its prosperity originated by a small controlling class. The treasury of America does not lie in the brains of the small body of men now in control of the great enterprises that have been concentrated under the direction of a very small number of persons.

The treasury of America lies in those ambitions, those energies, that cannot be restricted to a special favored class. It depends upon the inventions of unknown men, upon the ambitions of unknown men. Every country is renewed out of the ranks of the unknown, not out of the ranks of those already famous and powerful and in control.

There has come over the land that un-American set of conditions which enables a small number of men who control the Government to get favors from the Government; by those favors to exclude their fellows from equal business opportunity; by those favors to extend a network of control that will presently dominate every industry in the country, and so make men forget the ancient time when America lay in every hamlet, when America was to be seen in every fair valley, when America displayed her great forces on the broad prairies, ran her fine fires of enterprise up over the mountain sides and down into the bowels of the earth, and eager men were everywhere captains of industry, not employees; not looking to a distant city to find out what they might do, but looking about among their neighbors, finding credit according to their character, not according to their connections; finding credit in proportion to what was known to be in them and behind them, not on proportion to the securities they held that were approved where they were not known. In order to start an enterprise now, you have to be authenticated, in a perfectly impersonal way, not according to yourself, but according to what you own that somebody else approves of your owning.

and say: "This is the way. Follow me!"—and lead in paths of destruction! The old order, change—change under our very eyes, not quietly and equably but swiftly and with the noise and heat and tumult of reconstruction.

I suppose that all struggle for law has been conscious, that very little of it has been blind or merely instinctive. It is the fashion to say, as if with superior knowledge of affairs and of human weakness, that every age has been an age of transition, and that no age is more full of change than another; yet in very few ages of the world can the struggle for change have been so widespread, so deliberate, or upon so great a scale as in this in which we are taking part.

The transition we are witnessing is no equable transition of growth and normal alteration; no silent, unconscious unfolding of one age into another, its natural heir and successor. Society is looking itself over, in our day, from top to bottom; is making fresh and critical analysis of its very elements; is questioning its oldest practices as freely as its newest, scrutinizing every arrangement and motive of its life; and it stands ready to attempt nothing less than a radical reconstruction, which only frank and honest counsels and the forces of generous co-operation can hold back from becoming a revolution.

We are in a temper to reconstruct economic society, as we were once in a temper to reconstruct political society, and political society may itself undergo a radical modification in the process. I doubt if any age was ever more conscious of its task or more unanimously desirous of radical and extended changes in its economic and political practices.

We stand in the presence of a revolution—not a bloody revolution; America is not given to the spilling of blood—not a silent revolution, whereby America will insist upon recovering in practice those ideas which she has always professed, upon securing a Government devoted to the general interest and not to special interests.

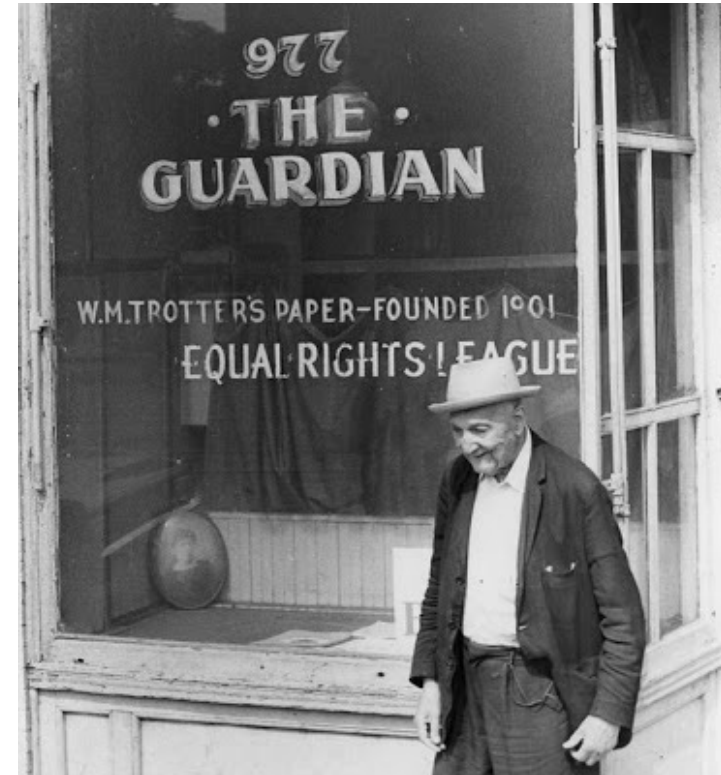
We are upon the eve of a great reconstruction. It calls for creative statesmanship as no age has done since that great age in which we set up the Government which we live, that Government which was the admiration of the world until it suffered wrongs to grow up under it which have made many of our countrymen question the freedom of our institutions and preach revolution against them.

I do not fear revolution. I have unshaken faith in the power of America to keep its self-possession. Revolution will come in peaceful guises, as it came when we put aside the crude government of the Confederation and created the great Federal Union which governs individuals, not States, and which has been, these 100 years our vehicle of progress.



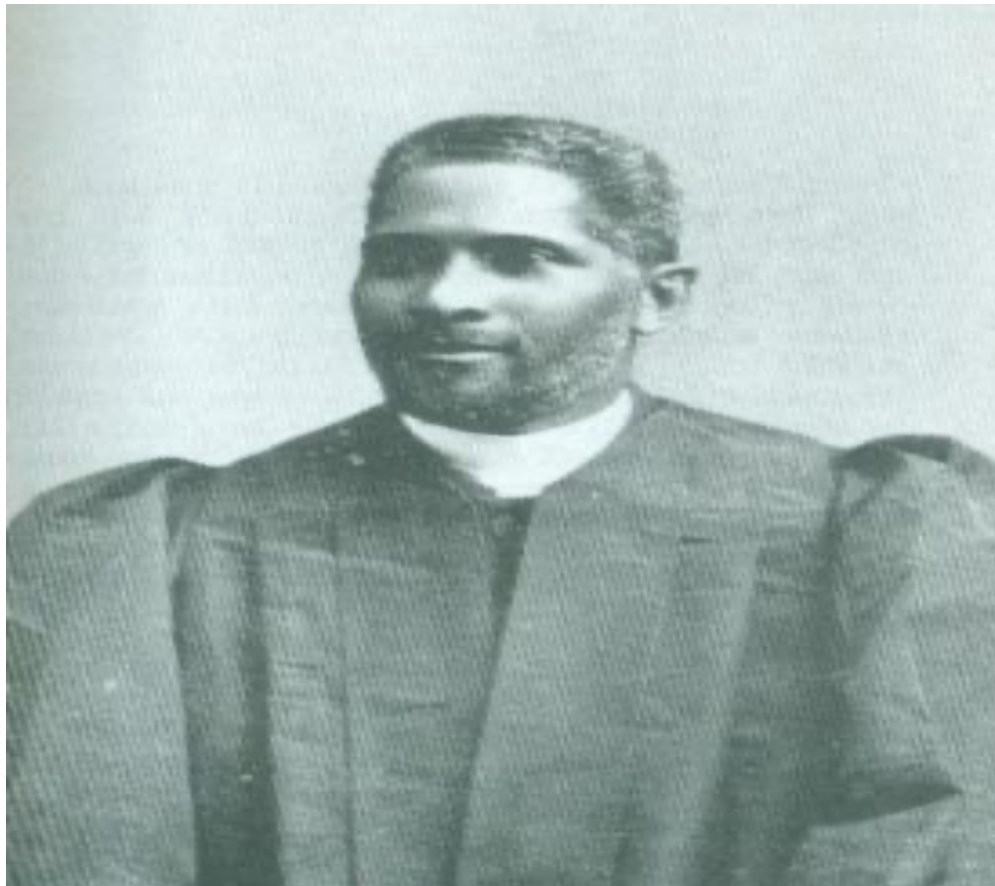
PRESIDENT WOODROW WILSON.

William Monroe Trotter Endorses Wilson



Bishop Alexander Walters endorses Wilson

President of the Afro-American Council



Letter from Governor Wilson

COPY.

WILSON'S WRITTEN STATEMENT TO COLORED FELLOW CITIZENS.

38 West State Street,
Trenton, N. J.,
October 16th 1912.

My dear Bishop Walters:

It is a matter of genuine disappointment to me that I shall not be able to be present at the meeting on Saturday night, but inasmuch as I am canceling every possible engagement, in view of the distressing assault upon Mr. Roosevelt, I do not feel that I can properly add others. I am fulfilling only those to which I have been bound for many weeks.

It would afford me pleasure to be present, because there are certain things I want to say. I hope that it seems superfluous to those who know me, but to those who do not know me perhaps it is ~~not~~ necessary for me to assure my Colored fellow citizens of my earnest wish to see justice done them in every matter, and not mere grudging justice, but justice executed with liberality and cordial good feeling. Every guarantee of our law, every principle of our constitution, commands this, and our sympathies should also make it easy.

The Colored people of the United States have made extraordinary progress towards self-support and usefulness, and ought to be encouraged in every possible and proper way. My sympathy with them is of long standing, and I want to assure them through you that should I become President of the United States, they may count upon me for absolute fair dealing and for everything by which I could assist in advancing the interests of their race in the United States.

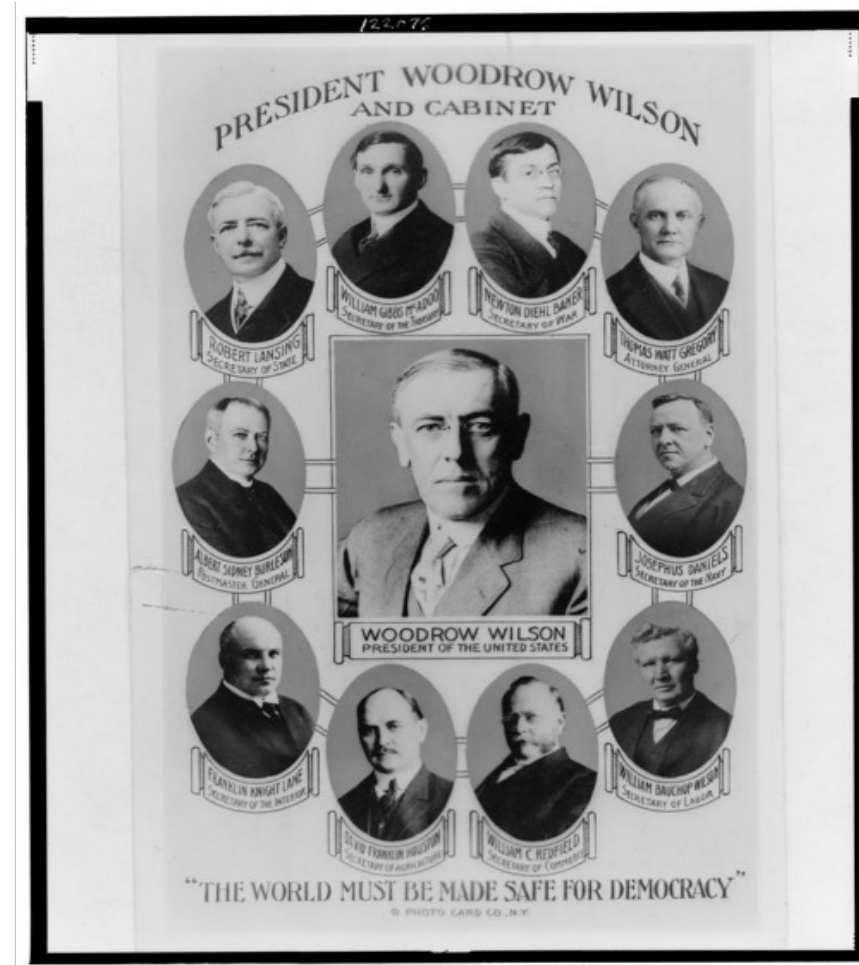
Cordially and sincerely yours,
Woodrow Wilson.

Bishop Alexander Walters,
New York City.

49-12-169

President Wilson takes office in March 1913

- ❖ The Bureau of Engraving and Printing
- ❖ The Treasury Department
- ❖ Post Office Department
- ❖ April 1914 – Wilson issued an Executive Order that required photographs to accompany federal job applicants.



Belle La Follette criticizes Wilson's Administration



La Follette's Weekly Magazine



On August 23, 1913, La Follette used *La Follette's Magazine* to launch her attack on efforts by the Woodrow Wilson administration to racially segregate federal offices as well as streetcars in Washington, D.C.

Archibald Henry Grimké

President D.C.'s NAACP chapter



Oct. 1913 rally at Metropolitan AME Church with 10,000 participants



Dr. Lucy Ella Moten

Dr. Moten's letter to President Wilson

Oct. 7th, 1913



In short, Mr. President, we ask you to hurl your great power and influence against this new form of caste prejudice, and to follow in some degree the policy of the Great Lincoln-- now so often misquoted by present-day statesmen--whose policy was to give to every American citizen, irrespective of race, equal justice before the law and a free man's chance. Once again, and in this connection, I have the honor to quote from your recent work "The New Freedom", in which you declare that this country should be a land lifting

"to the admiration of the world its ideals of absolute free opportunity, where no man is supposed to be under any limitation except the limitations of his character and of his mind; where there is supposed to be no distinction of class, no distinction of blood, no distinction of social status, but where men win or lose on their merits."

Yet, to the discouragement of the American colored man, blood distinction counts, and to such a degree, in some sections of our common country, that his very life is endangered in the exercise of his prerogatives as a citizen, in looking to the betterment of his social and political condition. The laws, indeed, should protect him in his thrift and in his freedom, and they should not be construed so as to restrict his uplift, as they are made to do in such segregation ordinances as recently enacted in the City of Baltimore, Maryland.

And it should cause little or no wonder then, if some of the simple souls among our colored citizens are at times in painful quandry as to whether or not it would be wiser to violently resent the open insults which the enforcement of some of these discriminatory statutes inspire, or to silently suffer and trust to the proverbial generosity and sense of fair-play of the better part of their white fellow-citizens, many of whom are none the less responsible for the enactment of such laws and for their enforcement.

Many of the leaders among the American colored people are at all times anxious to allay any violent resentment, and continually plead that this ill-advised and un-American legislation should no longer find a place in the statutes of the country. If, Mr. President, you could as the Chief Executive obtain a clearer conception of our status, and from the

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[Woodrow Wilson's letter to Bishop Alexander Walters](#)

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[William Monroe Trotter](#)

[Woodrow Wilson's Cabinet](#)