

Executive Order 9981

EXECUTIVE ORDER

ESTABLISHING THE PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE ON EQUALITY OF TREATMENT AND OPPORTUNITY IN THE ARMED SERVICES

WHEREAS it is essential that there be maintained in the armed services of the United States the highest standards of democracy, with equality of treatment and opportunity for all those who serve in our country's defense:

NOW, THEREFORE, by virtue of the authority vested in me as President of the United States, by the Constitution and the statutes of the United States, and as Commander in Chief of the armed services, it is hereby ordered as follows:

1. It is hereby declared to be the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin. This policy shall be put into effect as rapidly as possible, having due regard to the time required to effectuate any necessary changes without impairing efficiency or morale.

2. There shall be created in the National Military Establishment an advisory committee to be known as the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services, which shall be composed of seven members to be designated by the President.

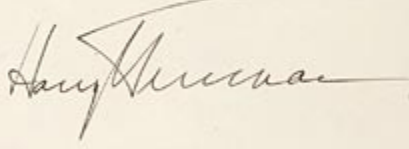
3. The Committee is authorized on behalf of the President to examine into the rules, procedures and practices of the armed services in order to determine in what respect such rules, procedures and practices may be altered or improved with a view to carrying out the policy of this order. The Committee shall confer and advise with the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary

of the Army, the Secretary of the Navy, and the Secretary of the Air Force, and shall make such recommendations to the President and to said Secretaries as in the judgment of the Committee will effectuate the policy hereof.

4. All executive departments and agencies of the Federal Government are authorized and directed to cooperate with the Committee in its work, and to furnish the Committee such information or the services of such persons as the Committee may require in the performance of its duties.

5. When requested by the Committee to do so, persons in the armed services or in any of the executive departments and agencies of the Federal Government shall testify before the Committee and shall make available for the use of the Committee such documents and other information as the Committee may require.

6. The Committee shall continue to exist until such time as the President shall terminate its existence by Executive order.



THE WHITE HOUSE,
July 26, 1948.

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES
FILED AND MADE AVAILABLE
FOR PUBLIC INSPECTION
JUL 27 10 39 AM '48
IN THE DIVISION OF THE
FEDERAL REGISTER

9981

General Omar N. Bradley

He commanded the First United States Army during the Invasion of Normandy. After the breakout from Normandy, he took command of the Twelfth United States Army Group, which ultimately comprised forty-three divisions and 1.3 million men, the largest body of American soldiers ever to serve under a single field commander. He became Chief of Staff of the United States Army in 1948 and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1949. In 1950, Bradley was promoted to the rank of General of the Army, becoming the last of only nine people to be promoted to five-star rank in the United States Armed Forces.



After President Truman announced Executive Order 9981, General Bradley was quoted in *The Washington Post* on July 28, 1948.

“The Army is not out to make any social reforms. The Army will put men of different races in different companies. It will change that policy when the Nation as a whole changes it.”

Note: After his comment, General Bradley apologized to President Truman.

Walter Francis White

Walter Francis White was an American civil rights activist who led the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).



Walter White was quoted in *The Washington Post* on July 29, 1948, responding to General Bradley's statement of the previous day.

“This statement by the Chief of Staff less than 24 hours after the Commander in Chief of the Army, Navy and Airforce had issued an executive order to eliminate racial discrimination and inequality to the armed services is unbelievable. It is another illustration of how men who have been isolated in the Army for many years from contact with the outside world are unable to understand or even be aware of the growth of enlightened public opinion.”

Telegram sent to President Truman on September 10, 1948, from Howard Uriah Omohundro, a private citizen of the United States.

PRES. HARRY S. TRUMAN-
=THE PRESIDENTIAL TRAIN DUE AM 30th STL=

YOU AND YOUR CIVIL RIGHTS HAS [sic] COST YOU THE ELECTION[.] I
HAVE ALWAYS VOTED FOR A DEMOCRAT NOW I AM VOTING FOR
THURMAN [sic]. (Strom Thurmond, Dixicrat candidate for President) WHY
DON'T YOU KNOW THAT THE SOUTHERN MAN WILL NOT TOLERATE A
NEGRO LOVER [?] HARRY YOUR [sic] THROUGH. YOU'VE NOTHING
SINCE YOU'VE BEEN IN THERE BUT TRY TO PUT MY DAUGHTER IN THE
SAME CATEGORY AS A SOUTHERN NEGRO. I'LL BE GLAD WHEN
NOVEMBER FOURTH[sic] SO I CAN PROTEST YOU OUT OF THE
WHITEHOUSE [sic]. YOU'LL NEVER NEVER [sic] AGAIN BE RESPECTED IN
THE SOUTH, WE SOUTHERN MEN ARE VERY EASY TO GET ALONG WITH
WHEN WE LIKE [sic]. I'LL CONTINUE VOTING DEMOCRAT BUT I'LL
VOTE FOR THURMAN [sic] TO PROTEST. YOU WON'T BE BACK IN
WASHINGTON AFTER JANUARY. YOU SHOULD READ THE HISTORY
ABOUT THE SOUTHERN PEOPLE. IF YOU HAVEN'T READ ABOUTH
THEM WELL. IF YOU GO ANY FURTHER SOUTH YOU'LL HELP DEWEY. I
REPEAT WE SOUTHERN MEN DON'T LIKE YOUR CIVIL RIGHTS.
PERSONALLY I AM VERY BROADMINDED BUT I HAVE SOME DECENCY=

HOWARD URIAH OMOHUNDRO=

Isaac Woodard Photographs



Photograph of Batesburg, South Carolina, Police Chief Lynwood Shull



Audio Recordings

Isaac Woodard's "Affidavit"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P11sW1sXNbs> Youtube time 0:00 to 3:00

Air date July 28, 1946. ABC Radio

Orson Welles commentary, "Officer X"

ABC Radio Youtube time 3:00 to 14:21.

Orson Welles commentary, "It was Batesburg"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jg4YbRxZpfl>

Air date August 25, 1946 ABC Radio Youtube time 0:00 to 6:25

Executive Order 9981, which established a blue-ribbon commission called the “President’s Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services,” was accompanied by Executive Order 9980, which created a Fair Employment Board to “eliminate racial discrimination in federal employment.” The committee was tasked with recommending changes to military regulations, in order to make “equality of treatment and opportunity” for all soldiers, seamen, airmen and Marines possible in the armed services, regardless of race.

Truman had informed Congress of his intent on February 2nd, and he made good on that promise with his executive orders. Still, it would take six years from the time Truman signed those orders until the day the last segregated military regiment was disbanded, in 1954 — the same year the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision set in motion the desegregation of American schools. And it wasn’t until the 1960s that the full desegregation of the reluctant military was considered accomplished.

In fact, the full desegregation of the military was not considered complete until July 26, 1963 — fifteen years to the day after Truman’s initial executive order — when the Defense Department, under Secretary of Defense Robert J. McNamara, issued its own directive, Defense Directive 5120.36, pushing for the elimination of discrimination against black troops outside of the military base.

In other words, the desegregation of the U.S. military did not take place with the stroke of a pen, nor was it completed — or actually even initiated — by Truman, who signed his executive orders in the summer of the last year of his first term, having succeeded FDR, who had died 82 days into his fourth term. Notably, Roosevelt, considered a Democratic hero, did not, in four terms as president, attempt to desegregate the military. Truman signed the order in the midst of a re-election fight that he was widely expected to *lose*. So fractured was Truman’s coalition that southern Democrats had abandoned the Democratic Party, running their own candidate for president that year on the segregationist “Dixiecrat” line — a southerner named Strom Thurmond.

The cause of the rift? Truman ordered a presidential level report in 1947 reviewing civil rights across the board, called “To Secure These Rights,” which aimed at reforms in voting and employment, among other things. As for desegregating the military, that process had begun in 1945, when Truman’s secretary of war undertook a review of racial policies in the United States Army, Navy and Marines.

Truman would issue that executive order in July of 1948, just months before the election, after A. Philip Randolph had gone to the White House to complain that integration of blacks into the armed forces was simply not taking place, and just days after the Dixiecrats bolted from the Democratic Party following the July convention, because of Truman’s strong civil rights platform.

That platform would change not just the United States military, and the fortunes of African-Americans who wished to serve their country without the scourge of segregation, it would also help set the stage for the broader fight for civil rights.

Introductory Reading

This reading has been shortened and edited.

The Conversion Of Harry Truman

William E. Leuchtenburg *American Heritage* November 1991_Volume 42, Issue 7

Harry Truman approached national politics with divided memories and divergent loyalties. He was reared in a border-state county as Southern in its sympathies as any Mississippi Delta town and by a family that shared Mississippi's racial outlook and held dear the hallowed symbol of the Stars and Bars. Yet Truman also harbored a powerful nationalist strain. He never regretted that the Civil War had ended in a Union victory, and he came to view Lincoln as a man of heroic stature, , , ,.

Truman's direct ancestors identified strongly with the slave South. All four of his grandparents were born in Kentucky, and when they migrated to Missouri in the 1840s, they brought their slaves with them. Truman's grandparents received slaves as a wedding present, and in Missouri one of his grandfathers owned some two dozen slaves on his five-thousand-acre plantation. His parents, Truman recalled, were "a violently unreconstructed southern family" and "Lincoln haters." His mother was an ardent admirer of William Quantrill, the Confederate guerrilla leader who, pillaging Lawrence, Kansas, in 1863, slew at least one hundred and fifty of its citizens, including women and children. One historian has called him "the bloodiest man in American history." . . . Martha Truman [Truman's mother] would have no compunction about saying, "I thought it was a good thing that Lincoln was shot."

When Franklin Roosevelt's death, on April 12, 1945, catapulted Truman into the White House, the white South felt confident that Truman would find its racial customs congenial. On the funeral train carrying FDR's body, the Democratic senator from South Carolina Burnet Maybank assured a Southern friend, "Everything's going to be all right—the new President knows how to handle the niggers." . . .

But on December 5, 1946, Truman demolished these comfortable assumptions by announcing the creation of a President's Committee on Civil Rights. He had been moved to act after a delegation had called on him to protest outrages against blacks. He was appalled especially by an incident in Aiken, South Carolina, where, only three hours after a black sergeant had received his separation papers from the United States Army, policemen gouged out his eyes. In Georgia, Truman heard, the only black to have voted in his area was murdered by four whites in his front yard. In another Georgia county two black men were gunned down by a white gang, and when one of their wives recognized one of the killers, both the wives were shot to death too. On being told at a meeting with the National Emergency Committee Against Mob Violence of the blinding of the black sergeant, the President, his face "pale with horror," rose and said, "My God. I had no idea it was as terrible as that. We've got to do something!"

The very next day he wrote his Attorney General, "I know you have been looking into the ... lynchings ... but I think it is going to take something more than the handling of each individual case after it happens—it is going to require the inauguration of some sort of policy to prevent such happenings." On December 5 Truman signed an order creating a President's Committee on Civil Rights, which he directed to look into not merely racial violence but the entire universe of civil rights. To carry out this huge assignment, he appointed fifteen prominent citizens under the chairmanship of the president of General Electric, Charles E. Wilson. Only two of the fifteen were from the South, and both of them were conspicuous liberals.

In October 1947 the committee issued its historic report, "To Secure These Rights." It found that a gaping disparity between the country's ideal of equality and its behavior had resulted in "a kind of moral dry rot which eats away at the emotional and rational bases of democratic beliefs." Furthermore, it said, with an eye toward the Cold War, the United States "is not so strong, the final triumph of the democratic ideal is not so inevitable, that we can ignore what the world thinks of us or our record." The committee came forth with nearly three dozen recommendations, including expanding the civil rights section of the Justice Department, creating a permanent Commission on Civil Rights, enacting an anti-lynching statute and a law punishing police brutality, expanding the suffrage by banning the poll tax and safeguarding the right to cast ballots in primaries and general elections, and outlawing discrimination in private employment. It also favored "renewed court attack, with intervention by the Department of Justice," on racially restrictive covenants in housing and ending "immediately" discrimination in the armed services and in federal agencies. Most controversial, it opposed not only racial discrimination but segregation. In particular, it advocated denying federal money to any public or private program that persisted in Jim Crow practices and making the District of Columbia a model for the nation by integrating all its facilities, including its public schools. The publication of "To Secure These Rights" aroused a storm of criticism. The chairman of the Democratic committee in Danville, Virginia, wired Truman, "I really believe that you have ruined the Democratic Party in the South," and a Baptist minister in Jacksonville, Florida, informed him: "If that report is carried out, you won't be elected dogcatcher in 1948. The South today is the South of 1861." . . .

Once Truman set out on this new course, he would not relent. When Democratic leaders asked him to back down from his strong stand on civil rights, he replied: "My forebears were Confederates.... Every factor and influence in my background—and in my wife's for that matter—would foster the personal belief that you are right. "But my very stomach turned over when I learned that Negro soldiers, just back from overseas, were being dumped out of Army trucks in Mississippi and beaten." Whatever my inclinations as a native of Missouri might have been, as President I know this is bad. I shall fight to end evils like this."

On February 2, 1948, Truman, undaunted by Southern criticism, sent a special message to Congress asking it to enact a number of the recommendations of his committee. Never before had a President dispatched a special message on civil rights. He called for an anti-poll tax statute, a permanent FEPC, an anti-lynching law, and creation of a Commission on Civil Rights. To end intimidation at the polls, he asked for legislation banning interference by either public officials or private citizens with the free exercise of the suffrage. He did not embrace his committee's recommendation to deprive states of federal grants if they did not abandon Jim Crow, but in keeping with recent Supreme Court decisions, he did call upon Congress to forbid segregation in interstate travel. "As a Presidential paper," the historian Irwin Ross has written, "it was remarkable for its scope and audacity." At the Jefferson-Jackson Day dinners in mid-February, Truman got rude reminders of Southern hostility to his program. In Washington at the most important dinner, a table at the Mayflower Hotel reserved and paid for by Sen. Olin Johnston of South Carolina was deliberately left vacant, in a conspicuous spot near the dais. Mrs. Johnston, a vice-chair of the dinner committee, decided not to attend, she explained, "because I might be seated next to a Negro." Truman, shocked by the ferocity of the assault on him and recognizing that his re-election was in jeopardy, sought to placate his Southern critics, but he would not appease them by abandoning fundamental principles. After a meal at the White House with members of the Democratic National Committee, Alabama's national committeewoman lectured the President: "I want to take a message back to the South. Can I tell them you're not ramming miscegenation down our throats? ... That you're not for tearing up our social structure—that you're for all the people, not just the North?" Truman reached into his pocket, whipped out a copy of the Constitution, and read her the Bill of Rights. "I stand on the Constitution," he replied. "I take back nothing of what I proposed and make no excuses for it." With Truman unrepentant, the South wrote him off. When he announced formally that he would run for re-election, John Bell Williams told his congressional colleagues that the President should "quit now while he is still just 20 million votes behind." The South and the border states were going to cast 147 electoral votes in November, said Senator Johnston, "and they won't be for Truman. They'll be for somebody else. He ain't going to be re-elected. He ain't going to be renominated." On the floor of the House, L. Mendel Rivers of South Carolina, shaking his finger, his voice trembling, cried, "Harry Truman is already a dead bird. We in the South are going to see to that." . . . The Southern Democrats continued to send off salvos against the President, but it

did not take long for them to learn that their threat to deny him renomination was an empty one. At the Southern caucus Gov. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina insisted, "We have been betrayed and the guilty shall not go unpunished." When the roll was called, however, Truman easily defeated the Southern favorite, Sen. Richard B. Russell of Georgia. Russell swept almost the entire South, but that is about all he got. So mutinous was the South, though, that the convention chairman did not dare attempt to make Truman's nomination unanimous, as was traditionally done to signify party harmony.


After the civil rights plank was adopted, thirteen Alabama delegates (one of them was Birmingham's police commissioner, Eugene ["Bull"] Connor) and all of the Mississippi delegation stalked out of the hall. . . . To lead them in the forthcoming campaign, the States' Rights party, or Dixiecrats as they were commonly known, chose Strom Thurmond as their presidential candidate and Mississippi's governor, Fielding Wright, as his running mate. Thurmond told seven thousand cheering, stomping delegates: "There are not enough troops in the Army to force the Southern people to admit the Negroes into our theaters, swimming pools, and homes. . . . We have been stabbed in the back by a President who has betrayed every principle of the Democratic party in his desire to win at any cost."

The Dixiecrats constituted a serious threat to Truman's bid for re-election. He already faced a formidable challenge from the Republican nominee, Gov. Thomas E. Dewey of New York, and the left wing of his party had broken away to back the Progressive nominee, Henry Wallace. Truman's chances, slim at best, seemed negligible if he could not hold the South. But in Alabama the Dixiecrats kept the name of the President of the United States off the ballot altogether. . . .


Truman, though, held firm to his commitment to bolster the constitutional rights of blacks. When an Army buddy advised him, from the perspective of a Southerner, not to press on civil rights, the President responded, "The main difficulty with the South is that they are living eighty years behind the times and the sooner they come out of it the better it will be for the country and for themselves." He added: "When the mob gangs can take four people out and shoot them in the back, and everybody in the country is acquainted with who did the shooting and nothing is done about it, that country is in a pretty bad fix from a law enforcement standpoint." Truman concluded by saying, "I can't approve of such goings on, and . . . I am going to try to remedy it and if that ends up in my failure to be elected, that failure will be in a good cause."

Truman meant what he said. On July 26 he issued two Executive orders. One, drawing upon his authority as Commander in Chief, affirmed the principle of equality of treatment in the armed forces without respect to race. The other directive forbade discrimination in the federal civil service. . . . For the first time since Reconstruction, he made civil rights a proper concern for the national government, and for the first time ever the Democratic party became the main protagonist for the rights of blacks. The South, and the nation, would never be the same again.

Correspondence between President Truman and Ernest Roberts, a friend from Kansas City



OPPOSITE
HISTORIC MORMON TEMPLE
CENTER OF
SALT LAKE'S SCENIC WONDERS



HOTEL TEMPLE SQUARE

Saturday Nite

Dear friend Harry:

Please pardon me, in my TYPING, and approaching you as I am but I am close to you as I know you, in my humble way.

Harry, in this letter, I could say many things to you and maybe correct you, as I think. I will not do that but allow me to pass this on to you.

Now I will skip over the " Equal Rights Bill " as you and I are "outherners and we should appease our thoughts and let the South be the South as you and I know. It is Mexico I wish to convey a message.


In Tampico, Mexico there is an American who is one of the few successful investors in the whole Country of Mexice. I know him well and you should know him and really know JUST how we are getting along with our Mexican Policy.

Harry, please contact Mr. I. B. Sutton of Tampico, Mexico. He will give you more about Mexico than all the information you have in hand. He is one man that is not a politician but he knows Mexico and can be helpful to you, yes, give you more definite information than all our Representatives who we have sent down there. I mean this Harry but maybe I have not expressed myself too clearly.

He comes to Denver each year and, at the present time, is at the Colburn Hotel, 980 Grant Street Denver, Colorado.

Friend Harry, I would not guide you wrong about Mr. Sutton. Contact Mr. Sutton, forget about our " Equal Rights Bill " appease the South and allow me to continue to be your silent pardner.

Oh Harry, you are a fine man but you are a poor salesman so listen to me --



SALT LAKE'S NEWEST HOTEL



OPPOSITE
HISTORIC MORMON TEMPLE
CENTER OF
SALT LAKE'S SCENIC WONDERS

HOTEL TEMPLE SQUARE

You can win the South with out the " Equal Rights Bill" but you aannot win the South--with it. Just why?? well You, Bess and Margaret, and shall I say, myself, are all Southerners and we have been raised with the Negroes and we know the term " EqualRights". Harry. let us let the South take care of the Niggers, which they have done, and if the Niggers do not like the Southern treatment, let them come to Mrs. Roosevelt.

Harry, you are a Southerner and a D--- good one so liston to me. I can see, you do not talk domestic problems over with Bess. ?????? You put equal rights in Independence and Bess will not live with you, will you Bess.

Well Harry, I have said my piece and I am only a boy who travels, helping you, but you are making it hard on me.

Anyway, PLEASE contact Mr. I. B. Sutton NOW . He has no idea I have written this letter so please do not convey.



Most Sincerely,

Ernest W. Roberts
Ernest W. Roberts



SALT LAKE'S NEWEST HOTEL

August 18, 1948



Dear Ernie:

I appreciated very much your letter of last Saturday night from Hotel Temple Square in the Mormon Capital.

I am going to ~~send you~~ a copy of the report of my Commission on Civil Rights and then if you still have that antibellum proslavery outlook, I'll be thoroughly disappointed in you.

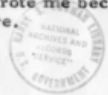
The main difficulty with the South is that they are living eighty years behind the times and the sooner they come out of it the better it will be for the country and themselves. I am not asking for social equality, because no such thing exists, but I am asking for equality of opportunity for all human beings and, as long as I stay here, I am going to continue that fight. When the mob gangs can take four people out and shoot them in the back, and everybody in the country is acquainted with who did the shooting and nothing is done about it, that country is in pretty bad fix from a law enforcement standpoint.

When a Mayor and a City Marshal can take a negro Sergeant off a bus in South Carolina, beat him up and put out one of his eyes, and nothing is done about it by the State authorities, something is radically wrong with the system.

On the Louisiana and Arkansas Railway when coal burning locomotives were used the negro firemen were the thing because it was a backbreaking job and a dirty one. As soon as they turned to oil as a fuel it became customary for people to take shots at the negro firemen and a number were murdered because it was thought that this was now a white-collar job and should go to a white man. I can't approve of such goings on and I shall never approve it, as long as I am here, as I told you before. I am going to try to remedy it and if that ends up in my failure to be reelected, that failure will be in a good cause.

- 2 -

I know you haven't thought this thing through and that you do not know the facts. I am happy, however, that you wrote me because it gives me a chance to tell you what the facts are.



Sincerely yours,

HARRY S. TRUMAN

Mr. E. W. Roberts
c/o Faultless Starch Company
Kansas City, Missouri

Note in longhand --

This is a personal & confidential communication and I hope you'll regard it that way - at least until I've made a public statement on the subject - as I expect to do in the South.

HST

(Envelope marked - Personal and Confidential)

Report enclosed - "To Secure These Rights" --
"The Report Of The President's Committee
On Civil Rights"

208 Feb 20 - 1957-709
(also note)



OPPOSITE
HISTORIC MORMON TEMPLE
CENTER OF
SALT LAKE'S SCENIC WONDERS



HOTEL TEMPLE SQUARE

September 2, 1948

Dear Harry:

I am late in answering your very nice letter of August 18 which reached me, along with your other important literature, at Twin Falls, Idaho. I feel very much honored in hearing from you, and sincerely appreciate your taking the time to putting me right on an important issue.

On this one certain subject you have a big job on your hands, but when one is right, it's pretty hard for anyone to be against righteousness. I know you are a busy man, so will not take up much of your time with my correspondence, but I would like to leave this one thought. The South has never known as we now know what equal rights mean, and this bill to them is like introducing a new food product or maybe a new brand of soap, and all they think about our vision when one mentions equal rights, is the thought of social equality. They overlook the justice in it, and the paramount impression left in their minds is the social equality which they think you are trying to force on them. It is something you must clarify in the minds of many classes of people, that social rights does not mean equal civil rights.

If I were handling this specific issue, I would be like the manufacturer who had many new items to introduce in a market. I would take one item at a time and place that one item, then gradually work on the other items until I had a complete line on the shelves. I would start on justice and make the South realize that our Constitution is based on justice, and that in the eyes of God, all are entitled to a fair trial. That would be my way of approaching the South--one issue at a time until in time the entire Civil Rights Bill would be accepted.

All this is going to be a big fight, but since hearing from you I am better fortified and have a clearer understanding of the facts concerning this issue, and just know I will continue to stand for the man who I know so well and regard so highly. I wish you well on your swing over the country, and trust I will have the pleasure and honor of meeting you enroute.

With all sincerity and best wishes to Bess and Margaret, I remain

Ernest W. Roberts

P. S. I am treating your letter confidentially,
as you requested.

SALT LAKE'S NEWEST HOTEL



September 8, 1948

Re: Civil Rights



Dear Ernie:

I appreciated very much your good letter of the second and I am most happy that you can see my viewpoint in this matter. It has implications, both foreign and domestic, that go far deeper than the surface would indicate.

Sincerely yours,

HARRY S. TRUMAN

Mr. E. R. Roberts
c/o Faultless Starch Company
Kansas City, Missouri