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December 19, 1938

My dear Miss Murray:

I have read the copy of the letter you sent me and I understand perfectly, but great changes come slowly. I think they are coming, however, and sometimes it is better to fight hard with conciliatory methods. The South is changing, but don't push too fast. There is a great change in youth, for instance, and that is a hopeful sign.

Very sincerely yours,

Miss Pauli Murray
225 West 110th St.
NYC

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225 W. 110 Street
Apartment 5
New York, N. Y.

December 6, 1938

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Dear Mrs. Roosevelt:

You do not remember me, but I was the girl who did not stand up when you passed through the Social Hall of Camp Tera during one of your visits in the winter of 1934-35. Miss Mills criticized me afterward, but I thought and still feel that you are the sort of person who prefers to be accepted as a human being and not a human paragon.

One of my closest friends and pals is "Pee Wee", whom you knew as Margaret Inness. I have watched with appreciation your interest in her struggle to improve herself and to secure employment. Often I have wanted to write you, but felt that you had more important problems to consider.

Now I make an appeal to you in my own behalf. I am sending you a copy of a letter which I wrote to your husband, President Roosevelt, in the hope that you will try to understand the spirit and deep perplexity in which it is written, if he is too busy.

I know he has the problems of our nation on his hand, and I would not bother to write him, except that my problem isn't mine alone, it is the problem of my people, and in these trying days, it will not let me or any other thinking Negro rest. Need I say any more?

Sincerely yours,

Pauli Murray
Pauli Murray

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December 6, 1938

To the President of the United States
Honorable Franklin Delano Roosevelt
White House
Washington, D. C.

Dear President Roosevelt:

I pray that this letter will get past your secretaries and reach your personal consideration.

Have you time to listen to the problem of one of your millions of fellow-citizens, which will illustrate most clearly one of the problems of democracy in America. I speak not only for myself but for 12,000,000 other citizens.

Briefly, the facts are these:

I am a Negro, the most oppressed, most misunderstood and most neglected section of your population.

I am also a WPA worker, another insecure and often misrepresented group of citizens. I teach on the Workers' Education Project of New York City, a field which has received the constant and devoted support of your wife, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt.

My main interest, the tradition of my family for three generations, is education, which, I believe, is the basic requirement for the maintenance and extension of democracy.

At present, in order to do a competent teaching job, a job comparable to the work of the established educational institutions, like all other professional WPA workers, I feel the need of more training. To understand the knotty economic and social problems of our country and to interpret these problems clearly and simply to workers makes it imperative that we continue our studies. Our wage standards are such that we are unable to further our education. Those of us who do not have degrees are unable to get them because of the general WPA arrangements. Those of us who have degrees, and yet feel an inadequacy of information and formal training, find it impossible to go further and obtain our Master's Degree.

Sometime ago I applied to the University of North Carolina for admission to their graduate school. They sent me an application blank, on the bottom of which was asked, "Race and Religion". (For your information, I am a confirmed Protestant Episcopalian.) As you know, no Negro has ever been admitted to the University of North Carolina. You may wonder then, why I, a Negro knowing this fact, did make application.

My grandfather, a Union Army soldier, gave his eye-

for the liberation of his race. As soon as the war was over, he went to North Carolina under the Freedmen's Bureau to establish schools and educate the newly freed Negroes. From that time on my entire family has been engaged in educational work in that state. My own father was a principal of one of the Baltimore City schools and my sisters and brothers are also teachers. You passed through Durham, where my family lived and worked, and where my aunt now a woman of 68 years, still plods back and forth to her school training future citizens of America. This aunt has been teaching since she was 15 years old, and for more than 30 years in the Durham Public Schools, and yet if she were to become disabled tomorrow, there is no school pension system which would take care of her, neither does she qualify for the Old Age Pension system which excluded teachers.

12,000,000 of your citizens have to endure insults, injustices, and such degradation of spirit that you would believe impossible as a human being and a Christian. We are forced to ride in prescribed places in the busses and street cars of those very cities you passed through in our beloved Southland. When your party reached the station at Durham yesterday, you must have noticed a sign which said "White", then a fence, then another sign which said "Colored". Can you, for one moment, put yourself in our place and imagine the feelings of resentment, the protest, the indignation, the outrage that would rise within you to realize that you, a human being, with the keen sensitivities of other human beings were being set off in a corner, marked apart from your fellow human beings?

We, as Americans and Negroes, actually have few rights as Americans. Laws are passed designed to prevent us from using the ballot, an elementary and fundamental principle of democracy. We have to live in "ghettoes" everywhere, not only in Warm Springs, Ga., but also in the city of Washington, the very heart of our democracy.

It is the task of enlightened individuals to bring the torch of education to those who are not enlightened. There is a crying need for education among my own people. No one realizes this more than I do. But the un-Christian, un-American conditions in the South make it impossible for me and other young Negroes to live there and continue our faith in the ideals of democracy and Christianity. We are as much political refugees from the South as any of the Jews in Germany. We cannot endure these conditions. Our whole being cries out against inequality and injustice. And so, we come to Northern cities to escape the mental and physical cruelties of the land in which we were born and the land we love.

You said yesterday that you associated yourself with young people, and you emphasized their importance in the current affairs of our nation. Can you ask your young Negroes to return to the South? Do you feel, as we do, that the ultimate test of democracy in the United States will be the way in which it solves its Negro problem? No, President Roosevelt, our problems are not just those of other people. They are far deeper, far more trying, and far more hopeless. Have you raised your voice loud enough against the burning of our people? Why has our government refused to pass anti-lynching legislation? And why has that group of congressmen so opposed to

the passing of this legislation part and parcel of the Democratic Party of which you are leader?

Yesterday, you placed your approval on the University of North Carolina as an institution of liberal thought. You spoke of the necessity of change in a body of law to meet the problems of an accelerated era of civilization. You called on Americans to support a liberal philosophy based on democracy. What does this mean for Negro Americans? Does it mean that we, at last, may participate freely, and on the basis of equality, with our fellow-citizens in working out the problems of this democracy? Does it mean that Negro students in the South will be allowed to sit down with white students and study a problem which is fundamental and mutual to both groups? Does it mean that the University of North Carolina is ready to open its doors to Negro students seeking enlightenment on the social and economic problems which the South faces? Does it mean, that as an alumnus of the University of North Carolina, you are ready to use your prestige and influence to see to it that this step is taken toward greater opportunity for mutual understanding of race relations in the South?

Or does it mean, that everything you said has no meaning for us as Negroes, that again we are to be set aside and passed over for more important problems? I appeal for an answer because I, and my people are perplexed.

Sincerely yours,

Pauli Murray
225 W. 110 Street
Apartment 5
New York, N. Y.

Copy to: Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt
White House
Washington, D. C.

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