June 9, 1941

Governor S. L. Holland
Tallahassee
Florida

My dear Governor Holland:

We are attaching marked copy
of the June, 1941, issue of THE CRISIS
and invite your attention to the editorial on page 183.

Very sincerely yours,

Ray Wilkins

RW: LH  EDITOR

PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE CRISIS PUBLISHING CO., Inc.
15 cents a copy  $1.50 a year  $2.50 two years
Official Organ: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
Editorials

Wartime Lynching

In the midst of all the fine talk about democracy and the rights of man, lynching proceeds without interference or punishment of lynchers in the nation which has undertaken to tell the rest of the world how to mind its morals.

So accustomed to lynchings has America become that we have ceased to gasp at brutal details, but even a casual scrutiny of the accounts of the lynching of A. C. Williams in Quincy, Fla., on May 13 must bring a shudder to the strongest stomach.

Here was a man only accused—not proved guilty—of a crime. He is taken from the jail by a mob, shot numerous times and left for dead. It is found that he is not dead and the sheriff places him in an ambulance for transportation to a hospital some miles away. Despite the fact that a mob had nearly taken his life, thus indicating clearly the lynching atmosphere, the sheriff provided no guard. The ambulance was halted by a group of men, the wounded prisoner taken from his stretcher and killed.

Nothing quite so callous has appeared on the national scene since the lynching in White Bluff, Tenn., some years ago when a deputy sheriff loaned his pistol to a mob leader, who promptly shot a Negro to death and then returned the smoking gun to the peace officer.

In commenting on the Florida lynching, the New York Times stated:

"Nothing that can happen in this country is better girst for the Nazi propaganda mill than a lynching..." It is therefore literally true that the unknown men who killed a Negro prisoner near Quincy, Fla., on Tuesday morning were doubly steeped in crime. They murdered a human being who had not been convicted of a crime, though he may have been guilty of one. They also betrayed their country. Nor can the Sheriff, who did not provide an adequate guard, or the State Attorney, who can find 'no clues to identify the slayers,' be absolved."

To this comment we add merely that if the Florida lynching was treason of a kind, what about the lynching of Private Felix Hall of the 24th United States infantry regiment, whose body was found hanging to a tree within the boundaries of Ft. Benjamin, Ga.?

America is marching to war for the purpose of stopping brutalities overseas, but apparently our government does not choose to stop lynching within its own borders, or even within the borders of its army camps, which are wholly under its jurisdiction.

Of course, this practice is calculated to make thirteen million American Negroes throw their hats into the air at the very mention of "defense of democracy."

Congress Can Regulate Primary Elections

In a case arising in New Orleans, the United States supreme court has ruled that Congress has the power to regulate primary as well as general elections where the primaries have candidates for federal office.

We have not been able to secure, before press time, an opinion from our legal committee on what effect this opinion will have on the fight of the Negro in the South to secure the ballot now withheld from him by numerous devices, including the so-called white primary election.

To a lay mind it would seem that the supreme court opinion makes it possible for Congress to open up certain primary elections to Negroes. If we are correct, no longer will it be possible to bar colored voters from primaries—solely on the basis of color—which choose candidates for the offices of Representative and Senator. This will be a step forward, although there will still remain the obstacles of the poll tax and the biased administration of the education test, to mention only two.

Of course, there is the task of getting Congress to pass the necessary legislation, but even if the bill of certain opposition from southerners, this could be accomplished through a united and skilful attack.

We Take a Bow

On page 187 of this issue we re-publish the poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" by Langston Hughes, first published in the Crisis for June, 1921. This twenty-tenth anniversary of the Hughes poem recalls the constant difficulty of maintaining an all-purpose magazine like The Crisis. The magazine has been first of all a crusader for the cause of the Negro, emphasizing the program of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. It has tried to be, next, a general magazine of Negro life. At the same time it has tried to encourage Negro writers and authors by providing an outlet for their talents into print, a necessary step toward their recognition by the general public.

This has been no easy task. A propaganda or "cause" magazine automatically restricts itself. Practically all such organs, white or black, must be subsidized because the nature of the bulk of their circulation does not attract the usual commercial advertisers. The encouragement of new talent does little, if anything, to attract new readers or new revenue.

There is a peculiar satisfaction, therefore, in our reflection upon the career of Langston Hughes, who went on from his first publication in these pages to world-wide fame as an author. We salute him. We take a small bow for ourselves, and we pledge once again that our pages will be open always to young men and women of talent.

Important Victory

Congressman Arthur W. Mitchell's victory in the United States supreme court in his suit over the denial of Pullman car accommodations by a railroad in Arkansas is an important milestone in the fight for just treatment of Negro travelers by railroads. The court ruled that Negroes may purchase first class tickets may not be denied Pullman berths or any of the accommodations which go with first class tickets. This is not a new pronouncement by the court, but one which emphasizes its previous decisions and also previous decisions of the Interstate Commerce Commission. It cannot help but lift some of the unfair and unequal barriers to travel hitherto to the lot of the Negro who ventured abroad in this "free" land.

It should be remembered that the decision in the Mitchell case did not touch upon the Jim Crow car as such. That hated institution is still with us. The Mitchell decision insures that those Negroes who have the funds and the opportunity may escape the Jim Crow car by purchasing first class tickets. For carrying through this fight to a successful conclusion, our Congressman deserves the thanks and congratulations which have justly been showered upon him.
July 7, 1941

Hon. Roy Wilkins, Editor
The Crisis
69 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York

Dear Sir:

As Governor Holland is out of town for several days I am taking the liberty of acknowledging your letter of June 9th and the marked copy of The Crisis. I shall be glad to call them to his attention when he returns.

Thanking you and with best regards,

I remain

Sincerely yours,

Executive Secretary

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May 24, 1941

My dear Governor Holland,

As a new resident of Florida, may I congratulate you for not letting the investigation of the recent lynching come to a halt. The local papers are with the majority of the people of Florida in condemning such a horrible occurrence.

It is a pleasure to know that the man at the head of the State is one who will see that real justice is carried out.

Sincerely yours,

Ruth Kristin
1435 29th Ave. No.
St. Petersburg, Fla.