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Ft. Des Moines Officers Training Camp

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### Ballou, C. C. to George W. Cabanise

Thomas Montgomery Gregory

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Colored Citizens' Training Camp,  
Fort Des Moines, Iowa.,  
September 14, 1917.

Dr. George W. Cabaniss,  
Washington, D. C.

My dear Dr. Cabaniss:

I was very much surprised to learn that anyone should construe the one month's extension of this Training Camp as an indication that the Colored Candidates for Commissions required more time than White Candidates, and that the month's extension was made in order to bring them up to the standard of the white camps. As a matter of fact no one is in a position to institute any comparison between the proficiency of the colored candidates and the whites, as no one has had an opportunity to compare their work. The Inspector General of the Army visited all of the Training Camps, and could therefore institute a comparison as to the little practical work he observed in his brief visits, and also as to their apparent discipline, "setup", smartness of appearance. I am convinced from his remarks that the Candidates at this camp would not suffer from any such comparison..

The fact of the matter is that there is no reason whatsoever for supposing that the extension of this camp to October 15th was caused by any considerations of relative fitness of candidates, and there seems every reason for believing that this had nothing at all to do with the matter.

There are, unfortunately, some people whose stock in trade is trouble making, and whose one desire on learning of the extension of this camp was to twist the facts so as to create discontent and ill-feeling. These trouble mongers resemble certain foul birds who enjoy no food except carrion.

There was not one word or figure in the report and recommendations of the classification boards at this camp that could possibly have indicated to the War Department, or anyone else, the slightest reason for believing that the Colored Candidates were not as well qualified for their commissions as were the White Candidates.

The War Department has not felt it necessary to explain its action, and it should not be necessary, but the following may explain the matter to those who see something sinister in everything they don't understand.

The men conscripted under the first call are to be actually mobilized in several increments. The reason is obvious. To dump thirty or forty thousand men in a camp all at once would be to create confusion if not chaos, and to entail much actual suffering. Most of the officers who are to handle these conscripts are the briefly instructed men of these three months' Training Camps. They can't be expected to handle such big matters efficiently till they have had a little experience with smaller ones. Then there is the vast problem of supply. The machinery needs time to get it to running at maximum speed and efficiency. It needs oiling up and to begin at rather low speed.

The colored troops are to be organized in units by themselves, and not mixed with whites. Since the Colored Officers' Training Camp did not begin until one month after the white camps, the white officers were graduated and ready one month before the colored ones could be. That the white regiments should therefore be the first ones mobilized is as simply logical as that two and two make four.

It will be well along in October before the last one of the several white increments can be called out and cared for.

What is the sensible thing to do meanwhile with the Colored Candidates for Commissions? Any man who knows anything at all of the necessary qualifications for an officer knows that three months are not one-tenth of the time really necessary for his training, and that not one of our officers of three months' training has more than made a slight beginning in learning his duties. If time were available they would all be kept in training for a much longer time. Now, is it the part of common sense to graduate these Colored Candidates a month or two ahead of the mobilization of the units they are to organize, feet, equip and train, and let them idle away the interim, or is it good business sense to continue their preparation by an extra month of work specially selected with a view to enabling them to avoid the very mistakes now being made by the less fortunate officers who however sadly they may need an extra month's training were not so fortunate as to get it.

No one but the above mentioned trouble mongers can have any doubt either as to the wisdom of this extra month's work, under the circumstances, or as to it being absolutely devoid of any reflection whatsoever on the Colored Candidates.

You are at liberty to make any use you see fit of this letter.

Sincerely,

(Signed) C. C. Ballou,

Brig. Gen'l. Nat. Army.