

9/9/60

#A110

Disc - Restaurants
Howard Johnson

4221 W. Cook Avenue
St. Louis, Missouri

To Whom it May Concern:

Before starting our recent vacation trip to several eastern states, my wife and I exercised our civic duty by voting in the primary election that was being conducted, and left St. Louis by car. We had a pleasant and uneventful trip to Columbus, Ohio, where we had dinner, and sought lodging at a motel for the night. After three attempts we were successful in securing a cabin; the first two places displayed vacancy signs, but we were unable to get accommodations because they had been reserved.

After a light breakfast at a nearby cafe the next morning, we drove to Washington, Pennsylvania, where we had lunch at a Howard Johnson cafe, and then on to Pittsburgh. Later, enroute to Washington, D. C. as we approached Hagerstown, Maryland, we saw a large road sign directing us to Howard Johnson's cafe two miles south of the city on Highway 40. We decided to have dinner there.

We approached the cafe with its gleaming neon sign, typical of the many Howard Johnson cafes in which we had eaten on many trips in previous years. We entered the structure and noticed that the interior was also typical. My wife and I went to the rest rooms to refresh ourselves, then found a vacant table for two beside a window. Ten minutes passed and no one came to serve us. People to the left, the right, in front and behind were served. Finally I sensed that we were being ignored. Soon the head waitress came toward our table with her eyes fixed on me, and with the meanest look that I have ever seen from a human being. A few feet from us she stopped, looked at my wife, turned and went away. Then a Negro wearing a white cap and an apron came near and looked us over and then went away. Here again came those piercing eyes; this time with a glint of confidence. She stopped at our table and said, "We can not serve you."

My polite assertions that we were very hungry; that we were U. S. citizens; strangers in the vicinity; that we had a Diner's club card; we were able to pay; we had Standard Oil and Texaco credit cards; are members of AAA, and they had recommended Howard Johnson cafes to us; that it was undemocratic, unchristian and inhuman to turn us away hungry- all of this brought firm and positive answers that we or no other colored people would be served in this Howard Johnson cafe, that was leased by the Del Pan Corporation of Hagerstown, Maryland.

Had this been in the deep south, I would have expected such treatment. Hagerstown is about eight miles south of the Pennsylvania border and about fifty two miles northwest of Washington, D. C., our national capitol.

I have written the account of this incident and am passing it on to you in the hope that you can lend your influence, to prepare or have prepared an amendment to some of the civil rights bills, that will be coming up in the various state and national legislatures, to do one or all three of the following things to help remove this immoral scourge from our country, viz:

1. Prohibit any firm from advertising along a public highway, beyond their premises, if they discriminate on a basis of race, color or creed. (It is unfair, if not unconstitutional to force Negroes to pay taxes to help build and maintain highways and then permit the highways to serve as a medium to guide them to a place where they will not be served, thus inconveniencing, embarrassing and disturbing their peace of mind.)
2. Compel any firm operating along a public highway, beyond the limits of a corporated city or town, to conspicuously display a sign indicating their policy, as to service on a basis of race, color or creed. (This will prevent Negroes from becoming victims of the above incident.
3. Deny any firm the privilege of operating across state lines under the same name, if they discriminate on a basis of race, color or creed in any state. (If it is unconstitutional for an interstate carrier to discriminate, it should also be unconstitutional for a firm operating interstate to discriminate.) These laws should apply not only to cafes, but to hotels, motels, hospitals and theatres or any other firm operating for public accommodation.

A great service will be done for our great nation and for the cause of human rights if the above items can be translated into law.

Sincerely yours,

J. Weldon Young