



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE

TWENTY WEST FORTIETH STREET • NEW YORK 18, N. Y. • BRyant 9-1400

January 31, 1962

MEMORANDUM TO: SOUTHERN BRANCHES

FROM: GLOSTER B. CURRENT, DIRECTOR OF BRANCHES

Our Lynchburg, Virginia Branch has uncovered the fact that Negro youngsters are not permitted to participate in the National Spelling Bee sponsored by 18 Scripps-Howard Newspapers and 54 other newspapers. The national finals, held annually in Washington, D. C., are unsegregated, but by that time the damage is done to those youngsters who are excluded because of color from participation in local contests.

According to James H. Wagner, Director, National Spelling Bee, each of the co-sponsoring newspapers "conducts its own competition locally, determines its own rules and procedures, and otherwise operates completely independently. The only two requirements a paper must fulfill concern the age and the grade in school of the speller it sends to the National Spelling Bee."

Prizes for local winners are supplied by the Encyclopedia Britannica whose offices are located in New York City. Mr. William Benton, former Senator from Connecticut, is the publisher. Adlai Stevenson, permanent delegate to the United Nations, is a member of the Board of Directors of Encyclopedia Britannica.

The national sponsors are taking the position that they have no control over the major policies of the 54 other newspapers which send finalists to Washington. We have been unable to obtain a list of the 54 cities in which these contests are run, therefore, in order to obtain this information, we are asking our southern branches to:

1. Check with the local school board and with Negro principals and teachers to ascertain if your city school system participates in the National Spelling Bee;
2. Advise us of the name of the newspaper sponsoring the contest and;
3. Report whether or not Negro youngsters are permitted to participate and the basis upon which they are allowed to compete.

In the event that one of your local newspapers is a sponsor of the National Spelling Bee and Negro students are excluded, we suggest that you take the following action immediately:

1. Protest to the Board of Education and the newspaper which sponsors the contest.
2. Protest to the Scripps-Howard Alliance. Send a letter to Roy Howard, Publisher, Scripps-Howard Newspapers, 230 Park Avenue, New York 17, New York. Also write James H. Wagner, Director, National Spelling Bee, 230 Park Avenue, New York 17, New York.
3. Write a letter to Encyclopedia Britannica, prize donors, in care of Mr. William Benton, Publisher, 342 Madison Avenue, New York, New York.

Please send the National Office copies of your letters and/or telegrams, and report immediately on all action taken. Keep us advised.

GBC:jwt