

M A U R I C E A . B A R B O Z A
9702 Waterfront Drive
Manassas, Virginia 22111

May 23, 1984

Mr. Donald E. Graham
Publisher
The Washington Post
1150 15th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20071

Dear Mr. Graham:

In March the Washington Post printed a front page story about a black women's thwarted efforts to become a member of a local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Few in the media would have recognized it as the important story that it is if it hadn't been for skillful investigative reporting by Ron Kessler and the Post's editorial decision to display it prominently. As events unfolded, the story ran on the wire services, in all the major newspapers and on national television and radio for more than a month. The paper's decision was a gamble that paid off handsomely in public interest.

Lena Ferguson is my aunt, and for over a year, I tried to get the press interested in what I knew was the most important news story concerning blacks and the DAR since the Marian Anderson incident. I talked with many journalists, but finally it was Mr. Kessler who intuitively understood the ramifications of the story and the interest that the public would have in it. Using telling quotations, he knitted together a picture of institutional racism that many thought had gone the way of the segregated lunch counter.

By exposing the DAR to public scrutiny, the articles helped make the organization a more responsible District of Columbia resident. The outpouring of public pressure they generated gave us the leverage to get the DAR to bar discrimination by local chapters and agree to help my aunt join one. But even more importantly, it gave us an opportunity bring a much-neglected aspect of American History to the public's attention: The role of blacks in America during the revolutionary period.

The DAR has agreed to undertake a project to identify all blacks who served in the American Revolution and publish the results, write a publication that would inform minority women that regardless of race or religion they could be eligible to join the DAR based upon descent from a man or women who served in the Revolution. The publication will describe the racial and religious minorities who helped the war effort.

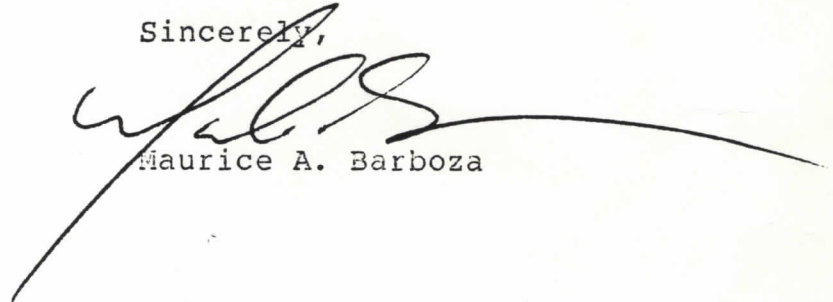
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The organization will award two scholarships to minority students as well as two to students at the University of the District of Columbia. The National Society passed a resolution to honor blacks who served in the Revolution and to back a similar congressional resolution I helped get passed. What the DAR will do is to atone for the years that it has left the American public with the impression that only whites served in the Revolution and therefore only whites can join the DAR. These steps are historic and unprecedented in the sense that a private organization has agreed help rewrite history the way it really happened.

The Washington Post deserves the gratitude and admiration of the townspeople of the District of Columbia. The DAR also owes the Post a debt of gratitude because from now on the organization will be judged on what it does in the future and not on what it did to Ms. Anderson 45 years ago. There were many heroes on all sides in this matter. The Post has its share of them. It should get an award for superb journalism and good editorial judgment.

Lena and I appreciate what the paper has done.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Barboza', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Maurice A. Barboza