

P. J. L. 5

League of Women Voters of Eugene

THE NEGRO IN EUGENE

Introduction

Confronted as we are by threats to our democratic way of life, there can be little question of our critical need today both to make positive re-affirmation of our democratic beliefs and to strengthen the weak spots in our practice of democracy. From all sides comes testimony that our treatment of the Negro in America constitutes the most glaring "beam in our own eye", the removal of which demands our most thoughtful and persistent efforts.

Two years ago at the annual meeting of the League of Women Voters of Eugene, members of the organization strongly expressed their wish that a "Minorities" chairman be added to the executive board. Last year the work of this chairman and her committee was formulated in our present local program item, calling for an investigation of conditions affecting minority groups in the Eugene area plus encouragement of the proper governmental agencies to assume their responsibilities towards such groups.

This report on "The Negro in Eugene" represents the efforts of the Minorities committee to gather information on and to put together a local picture of the most underprivileged group in our society. The committee has prepared this report on the assumptions that investigation should precede any pressure on governmental agencies and that providing and spreading information is always one important form of League "action".

General Background

For general background on the Negro in the United States an excellent reference is "An American Dilemma" by Gunnar Myrdal (or its very brief summary by Stewart Maxwell as a Public Affairs Pamphlet under the title of "The Negro in America"). This book is the result of an exhaustive study of the Negro and attitudes toward the Negro made by Dr. Myrdal, a distinguished Swedish social scientist, and his associates, in the early 1940's. Financed by the Carnegie Corporation, it was made to provide an objective picture of the Negro's situation in this country. Although there have been some changes in recent years, such as the decrease in the number of states requiring the poll tax, the recent Supreme Court decisions declaring that protective housing covenants are unenforceable in law courts and that it is unconstitutional for Negroes to be forced to sit apart or to attend segregated schools inferior to those provided for whites, the picture remains essentially as true for 1951 as for 1944.

It is still true that, compared to whites, the Negroes in this country are desperately poor, and are restricted by social custom and by lack of opportunity to become qualified for the better paying jobs through which they might improve their living conditions. According to Dr. Myrdal, "To the uninformed white person it appears obvious from everyday experience that the Negro is inferior. - - - It is one thing, however, to say that the Negro is inferior, and quite another to trace his inferiority to race. After careful investigation, scientists have found no basis for the belief that the Negro and the white races differ in intelligence or character because of biological heredity or color of skin. They have found, however, that such things as lack of sufficient food, bad housing, and poor schooling have great effect on

intelligence, character, and physical health. Less easy to measure--and difficult for the average person to understand--is the effect on a people of being treated as inferiors.

Significant evidence on the question of racial superiority was furnished by the results of the intelligence tests given during World War I. These tests showed that northern Negroes on the average had higher IQs than southern whites. It is the conclusion not only of Dr. Myrdal and his associates but also of social scientists generally (see, for example, "The Races of Mankind" by the anthropologists, Ruth Benedict and Gene Weltfish) that, while marked differences do occur, these differences are like those between a white horse and a black horse: they are differences due either to training or to individual quality, not inborn in race.

Dr. Myrdal highlights in his study the gap between what we white Americans say about the Negro, and what we actually think and do. This gap between profession and practice constitutes the "Negro problem", and our "dilemma". The "problem", then, resides primarily in the attitudes of white Americans, rather than in the Negroes themselves. It is to be seen as destructive in its results not only to the Negroes but also to the whites.

"A great majority of white people in America would give the Negro a much better deal if they knew the facts, but find it easier and much more comfortable to know as little about him as possible", Dr. Myrdal states. That the problem of correcting prejudice is not the simple business of merely supplying facts has been repeatedly pointed out: for example, in an extremely interesting book recently put together by a group of social scientists at the University of California, "The Authoritarian Personality". On the basis of a large number of case studies, this book demonstrates that many of us see only what we are predisposed to see, and that too many of us have deeply underlying personality needs which move us to find "scapegoats" in some weaker group upon whom to project our own hostilities and fears. Although we must not be-guile ourselves that information alone will suffice, this report is addressed to those with whom information is influential.

The work of gathering material was divided up among seven of the members of the committee, with each taking primary responsibility for one of the main sections which follow.

#### Vital Statistics

There are at present approximately 110 Negroes living in the Eugene-Springfield area. A count made two months ago reported about 160, but since then a number of families have moved away. It seems clear that the difficulties in securing decent housing and employment, topics to be discussed later, have been responsible for their leaving. A few families have been here for 8-10 years; the majority, however, came after the closing of war industries in Portland, and have been here 3-5 years. The largest number report themselves as having come originally from the states of Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas, in that order.

#### Location

There are three main areas in which Negroes live: in a section near the

Ferry St. bridge, on West 11th, several miles beyond the city limits, and in Glenwood. About a third of the group, roughly, is to be found in each of these locations, although there are generally more living in the West 11th settlement, owing to its having possibilities for expansion not found elsewhere.

#### Community Attitudes

Since it is only of recent date that any considerable number of Negroes have lived in Eugene--the proportion is still less than one negro to every 300 whites, as compared with a national average of 1 to 10--it would be interesting to determine whether attitudes are less crystallized here than in communities where Negroes have lived for a longer time. The committee does not feel able, however, to make any statement on this matter.

Last spring the Y.W.C.A. in Eugene started to make a scientific poll of public opinion in the community towards minority groups, with emphasis on the Negro. Test polls were made with a group of 33 men selected on a scientific sampling basis in the fields of medicine, dentistry, and real estate. The results showed that 2/3 of those sampled "want restaurants, hotels, taverns, theatres, and stores to serve all well behaved persons alike, regardless of color". About the same proportion expressed themselves as favoring admittance without discrimination to clubs, civic groups, youth groups, lodges, unions, etc. Only a small minority had reservations. In answer to a question on housing, even some of the realtors said that all races should be allowed to live wherever they could afford to live. Almost without exception the doctors and dentists felt that all patients should be treated alike. The great majority of those polled said they would have no objection to working with people of all races.

No claim of wide significance can, of course, be made for these results. It is to be hoped that the Y.W.C.A. will see fit to continue with this project.

#### Housing

It will be remembered that a considerable number of the Negroes who came to Eugene after the closing of war industries in Portland at first found shelter of a sort in makeshift structures on county-owned land adjacent to the Ferry St. bridge. When, in March 1948, Negroes were forced to vacate this property, 65 citizens met in protest at the County Court House. A citizens' committee of 15 whites and 7 Negroes, with Mr. Leon Glascock as chairman, was formed to relocate these families.

This citizens' committee wanted to avoid locating the Negroes in a separate district, but they found, first, that vacant houses were very scarce, and, second, that those few to be found were not available for Negro occupancy. A few families were able to remain in the Ferry St. bridge district; the head of one family, for example, was able to borrow money from his employer to build a duplex. A number of others found small shacks for high rent in the Glenwood district in an alley off of S. Concord Avenue. Although some plumbing and repairs have been added, these Glenwood homes are very small and are crowded close together.

A few colored families were able to buy lots on West 11th in an out-lying district. When it appeared that there were no other available facilities for housing the remaining displaced families, the first West 11th families suggested that the others purchase lots near them. Five real estate men handled the sales at an average price of \$300 per lot. The price charged for the church lot containing a small 2-room shack was \$2000.

It is to be noted that the lots were sold in such a way (in parcels of less than four) that submission of a subdivision plat to the Central Lane County Planning Commission office was avoided. It is further noteworthy that the Negroes who built new structures were not asked to get building permits. It was called to the attention of the committee that if the county building inspector had seen to it that the Negroes had such building permits, they might have avoided a number of bad practices in the construction of foundations, chimneys, toilets, etc.

The 11th St. location has proved to be entirely inadequate and undesirable property. There is no water supply and consequently no sanitation; the area is covered with deep water in times of heavy rain; the ground is hard as a rock in the dry season. Three shallow wells were dug; they proved unsatisfactory--the water being too murky to be useful even for washing clothes. All water now must be carted in cans. The families rotate the source of supply so as not to overtax the demand on any one donor. Despite this situation, the colored people keep their homes clean and neat.

Some attempt is being made to alleviate this situation by dredging the Amazon Creek which runs through this area. When this improvement is achieved, adequate drainage may allow the building of septic tanks.

The provision of an adequate water supply remains the most pressing problem for the 11th St. community. Through the kindness of the Superintendent of the Eugene Water Board, the committee had an opportunity to look over estimates on the materials, costs, etc. involved in the setting up of a water district to serve this area. (It lies, of course, outside the area serviced by the Eugene Water Board). Because of the difficulty in organizing a water district, the high costs, and the present scarcity of pipe, such a solution does not at present seem feasible.

A possible solution is the drilling of a well, properly encased and of sufficient depth. An experienced well-driller makes the tentative estimate that such a well would cost in the neighborhood of \$2000. Since this project would be difficult for the Negroes to finance by themselves, it would seem that here is a real opening for service for some church or other community organization. While there are, unquestionably, districts with white residents in which there is likewise no adequate water supply, it should be kept in mind that the Negroes are here because no other choice of location is open to them.

The story on housing told by one member of the Negro community seems typical: time after time she has talked with prospective landlords over the telephone, who became interested, on the basis of her husband's steady employment, etc., in renting to her family, until the question of color comes up.

Employment

The committee was fortunate in securing the cooperation of two leaders among the Negroes, who actually conducted a survey on employment and training, planned, with expert advice, by the Minorities committee.

This survey (made in late December, 1950, and early January, 1951) brings together answers on employment and training from 53 adult members of the Negro group. In addition, the poll takers turned in the names and addresses of 14 other persons whom they were unable to contact personally because these 14, all men, although in many cases had families here, were at the time of the poll absent from Eugene seeking work in other communities.

The picture of employment and unemployment is as follows:

<u>Employed</u>	<u>Unemployed</u>
22 men	19 men
8 women	11 women

In addition, 7 women reported themselves as housewives (not seeking employment).

Although it is to be recognized that there is more pressure among low income families for both man and wife to work, the unemployment among the women is probably not to be taken as seriously as that among the men. Note that among the men almost 1 in every 2 is unemployed; this contrasts sharply with figures obtained from the Oregon State Employment Service showing that the general level of unemployment in Lane County for the same period was 1 in 12. Two factors should, of course, be taken into consideration in evaluating the comparison: first, the figures from the Employment Service cover all occupations (including the "white collar" jobs, in which Negroes are seldom found); second, unemployment in "seasonal" jobs is naturally at its peak in the period used.

The questionnaire sought to get a picture both of the occupations in which Negroes have been able to find openings, and of the skills and training they possess. Among the men, almost half of those working at present are employed by the Southern Pacific, a few as "fire lighters", one as a warehouse clerk, the remainder as common labor in the shops. Other jobs which Negro men now hold are: janitor 3, "busboy" 2, chauffeur and butler 2, tile molder, cement finisher, truck washer, sawmill handy man, 1 each. The women have found openings almost exclusively in housework.

The following were the principal "skills and training" reported by the men not used in their present jobs: embalming and funeral directing 1, lumber grader, checker, etc. 5, carpenter 2, welder 2, cement finisher 1, chauffeur, fry cook, machinist, painter, 1 each. Among the women one reported that she is a registered nurse, another that she is a licensed beauty operator, another has had varied experience in "beauty" work, and another as a fry cook. To the question, "if you have skills not used in your present job, why aren't you in a job using them?", the most common answer was, "They don't hire Negroes for such work here".

League members are aware that Oregon has a Fair Employment Practices Act, passed in 1949, which provides that it is unlawful to discriminate in employment on the basis of race, religion, color, or national origin. Since this law is on the statute books, it seemed to the committee unrealistic to attempt any survey of employer attitudes. Asked about the success of the Oregon State Employment Service in securing employment for Negroes, the director replied that their records could not report the color of the applicants handled. Several of the Negroes stated that, to their knowledge, no Negroes had secured jobs through the State Employment Service.

The Oregon LWW worked for the passage of the state FEPA, and will, presumably, continue to watch and support the Act, if, in the majority opinion, it deserves continued support. League members who heard Mrs. Kathrine French, Deputy Commissioner of Labor in the Fair Employment Practices division of the state Bureau of Labor, speak at the November League meeting will remember that she laid stress on the work of the division in seeking to create a climate of opinion favorable to the hiring of Negroes and other minorities. The division emphasizes educational work and welcomes opportunities to confer with employers and employees. Such opportunities can arise, however, only when someone, a worker, for example, calls a situation to the attention of the division. Mrs. French pointed out that during this past year 36 Portland firms have hired Negroes for the first time; the credit for this, however, according to Mrs. French, should certainly be shared with the Urban League of Portland. The FEPA is the only piece of protective legislation on the state level for minority groups.

The committee attempted some investigation of union practice towards Negroes in Eugene. Under the FEPA it is, of course, illegal for unions to discriminate on the basis of color, etc. The stated policy of the unions is explicit. In practice it appears that, outside of the Railroad Brotherhood, few Negroes hold union membership.

#### Recreational Facilities

A survey was made covering the following recreational facilities: parks and playgrounds, swimming pool, theatres, bowling alleys and billiard parlors, and YMCA-YWCA.

At the Washington St. Recreation Center, colored children are allowed, and accepted by the others on an equal footing. Two boys, in particular, are often on programs. Colored children enjoy the swimming pool along with all the others.

The McDonald and the Rex Theatres stated that colored people are allowed in the theatres and placed under no restrictions. The Heilig Theatre made a similar statement, adding that several Negro college students frequently attend, and that two Negro families attend now and then. The managers of the Lane and the Mayflower could not be reached, but, since they are under the same ownership as the Heilig, it is to be assumed that their policy is the same.

Among the pool and billiard parlors, two stated that Negroes are permitted and do use their facilities, one stated that Negroes are not allowed. The bowling alley contacted does not permit Negroes. The YMCA-YWCA reported that two or three colored couples have attended their activities when especially invited. One boy has attended Y-teen parties both last year and this, and seems to be accepted and to have a good time.

Schools

A count made through the various school offices showed a total of 11 Negro children attending Eugene Public Schools. The largest number, 6, are in the Bailey Hill School, 3 are at Eugene High, and 2 attend Wilson Junior High. As far as can be ascertained, these children are treated like any other students. Last year one of the Yell Kings at Kelly Junior High was a Negro boy.

Asked about policy in regard to hiring Negro teachers, a spokesman for the school administration stated that no Negroes have applied for positions as teachers within the time of the present administration.

The Lane County Health Department and the Health Office of the District 4 Public Schools offer certain health services free to all. The principal services of the county health office are in sanitation, immunization, and infant health care. The school office cooperates in the immunization program and provides physical inspection of children in school or about to enter school, as well as health education in the schools. Three service organizations have special funds for additional health services for children, as follows: dental care--the Elks; eye care--the Active Club; ear care and hearing devices--the Lions. There is, also, the Childrens' Hospital School for crippled children. While Negroes do make use of these facilities, it appeared to the committee that there might be some unawareness on the part of the colored people as to the availability of the services outlined above. A school in the neighborhood has offered shower privileges to the Negroes in the West 11th settlement.

The head of the county health office stated that, where cases needing medical treatment have come to their attention, they have encountered no difficulty on the score of either color or ability to pay in making referrals to private physicians. Two Negro women declared that their own experience in securing medical care had been good, and that they had heard no complaints from other Negroes about serious difficulty in getting medical attention. They did comment that a number of colored people hold the opinion that they do not receive as adequate treatment as that generally accorded whites.

Social Welfare Agencies

The Red Cross, the Salvation Army, and the Lane County Public Welfare Commission were contacted to learn the services and assistance given to Negro people. Comments from these agencies were based on experience of the last several years.

The Salvation Army reports that they have not had many requests, perhaps 5 or 6 families. Grocery orders have been given while families were waiting unemployment compensation or receipt of a first check on a new job. Requests for services to transients have been about as few as those for local residents. No Negroes have been in the recreation program.

The Red Cross reported the visit of a social worker to the 11th Ave. area approximately once a week during the last year. Assistance has been given a number of families on an emergency basis. During disaster periods, many families have been given small amounts of assistance. A number of pairs of boots were distributed during the last high water. The Red Cross worker wonders what garbage collection service is available, since garbage is to be seen floating about whenever the water is high. She also wonders how the children get in and out when the water rises, since the road has washed out.

The Public Welfare office reports that Negro applicants are given the same service as any others, with possibly an extra attempt to consider every eligibility factor, since difficulties in obtaining employment are reported. The type of service given includes temporary grocery orders, aid to dependent children, services in arranging for return to former state of residence and old age assistance. Probably not more than 10 to 15 families have received services and financial assistance during the last several years.

#### Conclusions

The committee concludes that securing decent housing and adequate employment are the two most critical problems for the Negro in Eugene. The committee has expressed to one member of the County Court our interest in building permits for all, and has, likewise, expressed to the Oregon Employment Service our interest in employment opportunities for Negroes. Suggestions for further action in line with League policy will be welcomed and given careful consideration.

#### Committee Members

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