Thesis Approved

By

[Signatures]

R.J. [Major Advisor]

[Signature]

A.G. [Dean]
THE OMAHA DE FORRES CLUB

BY

JEFFREY HARRISON SMITH

A THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the Creighton University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master Of Arts in the Department of History.

Omaha, 1967
Dedicated To
Rev. John P. Markoe, S. J.
in Honor of his Golden Jubilee
in the Society of Jesus
and To
Denny Holland,
co-worker in the struggle
for social justice
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my thesis advisor Rev. Robert J. Shanahan, S.J. I feel most fortunate for having had the opportunity of working with this man and drawing on his knowledge. His patience and kindness is very much appreciated.

I would also at this time like to sincerely thank my major advisor, Dr. Allan M. Schleich, Chairman of the Department of History, for counselling me during my years at Creighton and Mr. Frederick H. Stenkamp, Instructor in History, for his advice on various facets of the civil rights struggle.

Finally, I am grateful to Rev. John P. Markoe, S.J., and to Mr. Denny Holland for familiarizing me with the history of the De Porres Club and to the staff of the Omaha Urban League for assisting me in my research on the Negro population of Omaha.
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The recognized history of the Negro in North America began with the importation of twenty African indentured servants to Jamestown, Virginia in 1619. During the next 244 years the Negro traveled a long arduous road which led from involuntary servitude to slavery to freedom.¹ Since the close of the American Civil War, the Negro's striving has been toward the attainment of social and economic equality within the framework of American Democracy.

But the upheaval of the Civil War and Reconstruction periods caused the South to adopt a new attitude toward the Negro. By the end of the Nineteenth century the region was beginning to pass discriminatory laws which tended to solidify the economic, political, and social inferiority of the Negro. In the North the custom was also for Negroes to be treated as a separate and second-rate if not inferior group.

With the coming of World War I, hundreds of thousands of Negroes left their homes in the South and migrated to the North. This migration, involving about 500,000 Negroes, gained impetus in 1915, reached its maximum in 1917, and largely ended in 1918.² Originally stimulated by Northern employers who sent labor agents to the Deep South, the migration was furthered by letters from those Negroes who had migrated. The migrants were attracted primarily by the higher wages of the North where they received $4.50 per day in contrast with $.75 to $1.00 per day in the South. Although the cost of living was higher in the North, the gain in real wages was appreciable.³ Other causes of their migration were the unsatisfactory tenant and sharecrop system, crop failures, lynchings, disfranchisement, segregation, poor schools and ill treatment by Southern sheriffs.⁴

³ Ibid.
To the black migrants, however, life was far from easy. After the intoxication of being out of the South wore off, the newcomers found that the sprawling, impersonal cities of the North were not quite the land of promise they had expected. Though they no longer saw "White" and "Colored" signs everywhere, they quickly became aware of segregation in churches and social clubs. The color line took visual form in the existence of a "black belt," a section of the city, characterized by rat-infested housing, poor health and sanitation facilities, high incidence of crime and juvenile delinquency, and police too quick with nightsticks or guns.\(^5\) These "ghettos," an abnormal development of the twenties, were soon considered natural areas of the northern city.

Left behind in the shadow of psychological, social, economic, and intellectual bondage, the lot of the urban dwelling Negro in the North, "caught in his quarters because of his inescapable social visibility,"\(^6\)


did not improve appreciably as the century progressed. "In the social field—as in breadwinning," says Myrdal, "the North has kept much segregation and discrimination."\(^7\) Lacking any explicit policy of urban planning, the North found it convenient merely to forget about the Negro.\(^8\)

The purpose of this study is to examine the activities of an organization which attempted, in some cases with good results, to improve the social and economic condition of the Negro in one particular northern city. This organization was the De Porres Club of Omaha, Nebraska.

The Omaha De Porres Club was born on November 3rd, 1947, when a small group of students from Creighton University interested in promoting interracial justice, responding to an invitation from a fellow student, Mr. Denny Holland, met to discuss the problems confronting minority groups in Omaha.\(^9\) At the second meeting on

\(^7\)Ibid., p. 599.

\(^8\)Ibid., p. 600.

\(^9\)Minutes, Omaha De Porres Club, Nov. 3, 1947.
November 10th, the basic organizational structure was set up. Mr. Holland was elected president of the group and Miss Peggy Wall, Secretary. Father John P. Markoe, S.J., recently arrived in Omaha from a successful campaign to integrate St. Louis University, was chosen to moderate the group. The Club took its name from Martin De Porres who had spent his life working among the poor and oppressed in Peru. The name was appropriate for a group dedicating itself to the cause of the Negro since De Porres himself was a Negro who had been declared Blessed by the Church.

Because membership was open to all regardless of race, creed, or color, the De Porres Club, though started by Creighton University students, never became an official campus organization. The new organization, dedicated to promoting basic rights for Negroes, attracted social workers, public-minded citizens, and students from other schools. During its fourteen year history, membership

10 Ibid., Nov. 10, 1947.

numbered in the hundreds and active branches were established in Kansas City, Missouri and Denver, Colorado.

Organized for the purpose of "educating people to think along lines of charity and justice as regards interracial matters," the De Porres Club became an activist-oriented group and a forerunner in the field of interracial relations. It engaged in sit-ins, picketing and boycotting for fair employment when C.O.R.E. still meant the heart of an apple, and before men such as Martin Luther King had arrived upon the scene.

"Father Markoe's De Porres Club," said former Creighton University English Professor Edward P. J. Corbett, "was fighting for civil rights in Omaha long before it became fashionable to do so."  

The activities of the De Porres Club in striving for Negro equality in job opportunities, housing rights, schooling and public accommodations anticipated the non-violent direct-action operations in the 1960's of such major Negro improvement organizations as the Southern

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12 Minutes, Omaha De Porres Club, Nov. 10, 1947.

13 Dundee and West Omaha Sun, April 1, 1965, p. 2.
Christian Leadership Conference, the Congress of Racial Equality, and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. As a focal and rallying point the Club also encouraged older, more entrenched organizations such as the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Urban League to take a more positive and active role in attacking from many angles the problems which the Negro in Omaha faced.

The current Negro revolt characterized by the two seemingly irreconcilables of positive action combined with the passive resistance of Mahatma Gandhi was a real living force in Omaha almost a decade before a Negro, Mrs. Rosa Parks, boarded a Cleveland Avenue bus in Montgomery, Alabama, sat in the white section and refused the demands of the driver that she vacate her seat. Years before Martin Luther King demanded that Negro bus operators be employed on predominantly Negro routes as part of the resolution to end the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955, the De Porres Club was demanding that the Street Railway Company of Omaha employ drivers

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on all routes regardless of color.

The city in which the De Porres Club did its work was Omaha, but it might as well have been any Northern city with a Negro ghetto, for the story of the Negro in Omaha depicts not merely the epic of one racial colony, but reflects the whole cycle of Negro migration, settlement, community structure, and the social inter-relations of Northern whites and Negroes.

In order to comprehend the situation that confronted the De Porres Club in Omaha—a situation not unique to this city—it will be necessary to make a demographic survey of the Negro population, concentrating on its status in the late 1940's and early 50's.
CHAPTER I

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY OF
OMAHA'S NEGRO POPULATION

The migration of Negroes to the North is a post Civil War phenomenon, and the major factor of this move­ment was that the industrial cities of the North pro­vided job opportunities.¹ Omaha was no exception to this pattern which witnessed Negroes swelling the labor ranks in the railroad, smelting, and packing industries of this city. Though some Negroes moved here to be with relatives and friends, the major portion was lured to Omaha by the labor agents of the larger industries centered in Omaha.

The years between 1876 to 1895 saw the culmi­nation of labor's efforts to organize on a national scale. The upheavals of this era unwittingly involved the Negro and provided another impetus for his migration northward. The rise of the strike proved to be labor's most effective weapon to redress evils and to organize nationally. In order to thwart unionization and to

¹T. Earl Sullenger, Studies in Urban Sociology (Omaha: University of Omaha, 1933), p. 47.
smash strikes, industry hit upon the idea of importing Negro strike-breakers. In Omaha, the Union Pacific employed this method in 1877, the Smelting Industry in 1880, and the Packing Houses in 1894. In general Negroes imported as strike-breakers remained in Omaha after the strikes ended and found work in the more menial and unskilled areas of Omaha industrial plants.2

During the First World War the acute shortage of laborers, particularly in the packing plants, brought additional Negroes to Omaha.3 Between 1910 and 1920 the Negro population of the state rose from 7,689 to 13,242.4 The Omaha Negro population of the state rose from 5,143 to 13,315, a 100.6% rise. In the same decade the white population of the city increased by 36,105 persons or a 24.9% rise over 1910.5

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3Ibid.


5Ibid., p. 44.
The Negroes who arrived in Omaha from the South were extremely poor and settled in the poorer residential districts of the city. They tended as a result of economic pressure to become segregated from the white population. This fact of segregation in Omaha is typical of segregation throughout the North. Myrdal describes segregation in the following way:

Each city has a pattern of its own determined by the percentage of Negroes in the total population, the distribution of Negro employment, the distribution of the areas where property is within the means of colored families, the attitude of the people toward segregation, and the rate of expansion of business and manufacturing sections.⁶

This pattern was re-enacted in Omaha where the Negroes moved generally into the second and third wards on the north side of the city or the seventh ward on the south side.⁷

By 1930, the Negro population of Omaha was 11,123, divided almost equally as to sex, listing 5,607 male and


5,516 female. By 1940, a slight increase in the Negro population was shown, the number totaling 12,015. By mid-century, Omaha's Negro population was 16,311. This was 6.5 per cent of the total population of 251,117. Three-fourths of this Negro population lived in the near northside—in census tracts seven through fifteen. A small percentage lived in a section of South Omaha, and a few lived in the three block area just west of census tracts seven, ten, eleven, and fifteen. Thus, the Negro population was concentrated in one area of the city.

This convergence is not only a local picture of high residential concentration among Negroes, for the following table indicates residential segregation in North Central cities in 1950 and demonstrates that the situation which existed in Omaha was typical throughout

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the North Central United States. The figures represent the percentage of non-whites that would have to move to other areas of the city to effect an even distribution of races.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Omaha</td>
<td>92.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Des Moines</td>
<td>89.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis</td>
<td>92.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>91.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wichita</td>
<td>93.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Paul</td>
<td>90.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topeka</td>
<td>80.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas City, Mo.</td>
<td>91.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toledo</td>
<td>91.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detroit</td>
<td>88.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Negro population of Omaha increased 39.5 per cent during the ten year period from 1940 to 1950 as compared with twelve per cent for the overall Omaha population. During that same period, 8,200 rental and sales units were built in Omaha, but only twenty-five were available to Negro citizens. Restrictive rental, financing, covenants, and general sales practices operated to prevent freedom of movement by qualified Negro citizens.  


Myrdal says of the methods employed to reinforce residential segregation:

Various organized techniques have been used to reinforce the spontaneous segregational attitudes and practices of whites in keeping Negro residences restricted to certain areas in a city. These include local zoning ordinances, restrictive covenants and terrorism.... The exact extent of the restrictive covenant has not been ascertained, but in Chicago it has been estimated that 80 per cent of the city is covered by such agreements.\(^\text{13}\)

The area of the near northside, besides being overcrowded, was also characterized by sub-standard housing. Of the houses, 78.3 per cent were built in 1919 or earlier as compared with 56.5 per cent for Omaha as a whole in 1953. Only six per cent of the houses in the near northside area were built after 1940. Most of these were public housing.\(^\text{14}\)

In 1945, a Mayor's Housing Committee survey revealed that 15.2 per cent of the Negro homes should be condemned, that 9.2 per cent needed major repairs,

\(^{13}\)Myrdal, II, pp. 623-624.

\(^{14}\)George H. Robinson, Brief on Omaha, Nebraska, A Report to the Regional Urban Renewal Institute, Kansas City, Missouri, February 11-12, 1957, prepared by the Omaha Urban League.
and that only 50 per cent of all the homes appraised were meeting minimum standards of good housing.\textsuperscript{15}

A comparison of the average monthly rental paid by Negroes, approximately $15.00, with the average figure of $35.00 for the state as a whole, indicates that the houses used by Negroes were generally in poor condition.\textsuperscript{16} Wallace Stegner describes Negro housing in the following way:

Housing for colored people, though better in the South than in most crowded Northern cities, is often sub-standard. Negroes live in such shacks as they can afford or in houses given up by white residents.\textsuperscript{17}

The post-war housing boom almost completely ignored Omaha's non-white population. During the ten year period from 1947 to 1957, twenty-three major housing sub-divisions of one hundred homes or more were developed, none of them open to non-whites. Seven major rental

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{15}The Negro in Omaha, A Report prepared by the Omaha Urban League (Omaha: Omaha Urban League, April, 1951), p. 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{16}Nebraska Writers' Project, p. 19.
\end{itemize}
housing projects, including one at Strategic Air Command headquarters, were constructed. Non-whites were admitted in only two—SAC apartments for airmen and their families and one public housing project for low income families. In the five year period between 1952 and 1957, there were 13,293 new homes built; only 32 or 0.2 percent were available to Negro buyers.¹⁸

This description of Negro housing conditions is also an indication of their standard of living. In the industrial life of Omaha, Negroes were accorded, as in other aspects of economic life, an inferior status. Unemployment was widespread among this group. The majority of those who were working did so under the handicaps of low wages, seasonal employment, and lack of opportunity for advancement.¹⁹ The median income in 1950 for the City of Omaha was $2,591.00. Non-whites in tract 11 had median incomes of $1,942.00; tract 12, $1,750.00; and tract 15, $1,229.00. These medians were

¹⁸Robinson, pp. 1-2.

¹⁹Nebraska Writers' Project, p. 21.
25 to 52 per cent under that for the city.\textsuperscript{20} Eighty-eight per cent of the employed male Negroes averaged in wages from $32.50 to $42.00 a week. Eighty-eight per cent of the employed female Negroes averaged in wages from $18.00 to $35.00 a week.\textsuperscript{21} That the disparity in median income between whites and non-whites was typical throughout the nation is evidenced by these statistics from the year 1954:\textsuperscript{22}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of Non-white median income to white</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Central</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since approximately eighty-seven per cent of all employed Negroes in Omaha worked at unskilled or service jobs, it is clear that most Negroes received small wages.

\textsuperscript{20}Robinson, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{21}The Negro in Omaha, A Report of the Omaha Urban League, April 1951, p. 1.
The remaining 13 per cent had clerical, semi-professional, professional and manual skilled jobs. The bulk of the Negro labor was to be found in the packing industries, the railroads, and in hotels, restaurants, and clubs. The same story was true nationally as shown by Ginzberg:

Among male nonfarm workers in 1950, slightly less than one-fifth of the Negroes in the South, slightly less than one-fourth of the Negroes outside the South, but over three-fifths of the whites were employed in non-manual occupations or in skilled jobs.

Of the twenty-two per cent of Omaha's Negroes qualified for clerical, professional, and skilled positions, only thirteen per cent were so employed. Similarly, of the approximately eight thousand employers in Omaha, only 806 employed Negroes in any capacity and just a fraction of these 806 employed them at their highest skill. The concept of the Negro held by employers in

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24 Nebraska Writers' Project, p. 22.


Omaha no doubt proved to be one of the greatest obstacles in the way of enlarged opportunities for colored workers. Sullenger's report on the reactions of two such employers interviewed regarding better jobs illustrates the point:

We have always used them as porters and janitors and they work well; our office work requires special skill which a colored person would not be expected to have.

A colored girl would seriously affect our business. The public would not have confidence in her ability.27

Of this type of discrimination, Ginzberg says:

Overt job discrimination is only one of the important hurdles which must be overcome before color can disappear as a determining factor in the lives and fortunes of men.28

The economic and housing conditions of Negroes stimulated the growth of health and welfare problems. These problems abounded in an area with a density of 34.9 per acre as compared with 13 per acre for the city as a whole, an area with the highest traffic accident rate in the city, an area poor in municipal services.29

27 Sullenger, p. 50.
28 Ginzberg, p. 7.
29 The Negro in Omaha, A Report of the Omaha Urban League, April, 1951, p. 2.
Negroes experienced a higher incidence of illness than did whites in the community. Because of their generally low incomes Negroes did not spend as much money on food, clothing, and medical and dental care. Poor sanitation, delayed medication and congested dwellings are also factors contributing to a lower standard of health. Furthermore, there was a high death rate. In 1938, for example, there were among Negroes in Nebraska 207 deaths, but only 173 births.\textsuperscript{30} Among non-white races in Omaha in 1943, there were 258 live-births and 217 deaths.\textsuperscript{31} Myrdal, in relating the living conditions of Negroes to their health, says:

A large majority of Negro families have to live on a standard which represents a constant threat to their health.\textsuperscript{32}

The welfare situation is much the same. In Omaha, in 1951, 33 1/3 per cent of all unmarried mothers were Negro. Three-fourths of these were in their teens as compared to one-third of the white mothers. Forty-six per cent of the children under the Aid to Dependent

\textsuperscript{30}Nebraska Writers' Project, p. 20.


\textsuperscript{32}Myrdal, I, p. 366.
Children program were Negro, while they represented only six and one-half per cent of the general population. Sixteen per cent of the children handled by the Douglas County Juvenile Court were Negro.\textsuperscript{33} The generally poor conditions existing in a blighted slum area and the resultant effects upon the Negro is shown by Myrdal:

\begin{quote}
The correlation between poor housing on the one hand, and tuberculosis, venereal disease, prostitution, juvenile delinquency, and crime, on the other hand, has been demonstrated so often by American experts that we do not have to add anything to the evidence. This point should be kept in mind in any evaluation of Negro family life, of Negro crime and of Negro sickness.\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

With residential segregation in every Northern city of any size, there naturally comes a certain amount of segregation in schools, hospitals, and other public places.\textsuperscript{35} The City of Omaha was no exception, and its attitude toward the Negro was reflected in segregation.

\textsuperscript{33}\textit{The Negro in Omaha}, A Report of the Omaha Urban League, April 1951, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{34}Myrdal, I, 376.

\textsuperscript{35}\textit{Ibid.}, II, pp. 601-602.
and discrimination in such areas as recreation, lodging, hospitals, and eating places. Even the Roman Catholic Church in this city had what might be termed a "Jim Crow" church.

These conditions were evident to a number of individuals and some operated to correct them. The De Porres Club investigated cases in which Negroes were discouraged from swimming at one of the city's public pools. The Club also challenged the discriminatory practices of the manager of the city's largest roller skating rink. A discriminatory policy on the part of the managers of the city's hotels and the practice of segregating patients in the city's hospitals was found to have been standard practice upon testing by the De Porres Club.

Mixed groups from the De Porres Club confronted discrimination in many eating places from proprietors

36 Minutes, Omaha De Porres Club, June 21, 1948.

37 The Omaha Star, July 10, 1953, p. 1.

38 Minutes, Omaha De Porres Club, Aug. 27, 1951, and Oct. 29, 1951.

39 Ibid., April 21, 1949.
who refused service outright, attempted to discourage the Negro customers by providing them with dirty eating utensils, or tried to separate the whites and Negroes in the group. The Young Christian Workers in April, 1958, surveyed sixty-five restaurants to obtain a list of restaurants that would not discriminate against Negro convention delegates. They were specifically interested in the members of the Baptist Sunday School Convention, and they found that eleven would not serve them, fifteen were reluctant to serve them, and eight did not want their name put on a list for convention delegates. Myrdal presents a similar picture of institutionalized segregation:

Negroes are requested not to use bathing beaches reserved for whites; Negroes are requested not to patronize certain dance halls, hotels and restaurants, and things are made unpleasant for them if they do.


42 Interview with Father Markoe, June 16, 1966.

43 Restaurant Survey taken by the Young Christian Workers, April, 1958.

44 Myrdal, II, p. 617.
Nebraska, like many other non-southern states in the late nineteenth century, had passed a state civil rights bill. This had been done in order to soften the blow to their colored population when the Supreme Court struck down the Civil Rights Act of 1875 which sought to secure equal rights for all citizens at hotels and public places of amusement. The Nebraska civil rights legislation, passed in 1893, reads:

All persons within this state shall be entitled to a full and equal enjoyment of the accommodations, advantages, facilities and privileges of inns, restaurants, public conveyances, barber shops, theatres, and other places of amusement, subject only to the conditions and limitations established by law and applicable alike to every person.

Violations; penalty. Any person who shall violate the provisions of section 20-101 by denying to any person except for reasons by law applicable to all persons, the full enjoyment of any of the accommodations, advantages, facilities or privileges enumerated in said section, or by aiding or inciting such denials, shall for each offense be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and be fined in any sum not less than twenty-five dollars, nor more than one hundred dollars, and pay the costs of the prosecution.


Myrdal, on the other hand, views these civil rights laws as ineffective:

In many Northern cities Negroes relate that they find it difficult to get the courts to punish violations of the civil rights laws; for example, when Negroes are not permitted in certain restaurants and hotels. In such cases it is often difficult to obtain proofs which substantiate the charges, but this does not explain satisfactorily why these laws have as yet so largely remained paper decrees.\footnote{Myrdal, II, p. 528.}

Omaha, therefore, like other Northern cities spent a large part of its energy turning away from one of the principal facts of urban life. This protracted failure to see reality makes Omaha a part of Baldwin's "North" when he says of it: "In exactly the same way that the South imagines that it 'knows' the Negro, the North imagines that it has set him free."\footnote{James Baldwin, \textit{Nobody Knows My Name} (New York: Dial Press, Inc., 1963), p. 98.}

The greatest achievements must begin somewhere. What one interracial group, the De Porres Club, endeavored to do about raising the standard of human freedom
for the Negro in the typical Northern city of Omaha will now be examined. The monumental failure of this city to respond to the needs and aspirations of a minority group is unfortunately typical of the history of a nation which sooner or later must meet this its greatest of challenges.
CHAPTER II

THE DE PORRES CLUB'S BEGINNINGS, EDUCATIONAL PHASE, AND CONFRONTATION WITH ACTUAL SITUATIONS INVOLVING SEGREGATION AND DISCRIMINATION

The De Porres Club is typical of what sociologists refer to as a voluntary association, a group formed to meet those social needs currently ignored by other institutions. The De Porres Club emerged to fill such need in a particular place and in a particular time: the lack of social justice for the Negro in post World War II Omaha.

Assuming that social injustice is rooted in ignorance, the De Porres Club regarded the need for education as a paramount goal. Citizens had to be educated to realize that the solution of interracial problems must spring from the principles of justice and charity.

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Robin M. Williams, American Society: A Sociological Interpretation (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), p. 498. As the De Porres Club matured, it moved from an informal to a formal organization. Meetings were held at a specified time, officers were elected, and committees were appointed. Furthermore, the Club adopted a Credo and Pledge. (For full text of the Credo and Pledge, see Appendix I, p. 94.)
and not from a mere emotional response predicated on the myths of folklore regardless of how persuasive, persistent, and rooted in tradition the myth might be.

In pursuing this goal, the Club gathered an extensive bibliography of books, pamphlets, and magazines dealing with all aspects of the interracial situation. This library was originally made available in a classroom at Creighton University which was used by the Club. About a year later a Center was established at 1914 North 24th Street in the heart of the Negro ghetto. The De Porres Club now had a more permanent place for its growing library, plus larger space for reading and discussion rooms. The Center was an important step in the development of the Club since it allowed for more adequate programs to be arranged and made the library available to a much larger reading audience. As a result, discussions based on readings available at the Center

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2John P. Markoe, S.J., "Omaha De Porres Center," Interracial Review, XXI (February, 1950), pp. 24-25. Hereafter referred to as Irr., "Omaha De Porres Center." Although some of these readings were in depth studies such as Gunnar Myrdal's An American Dilemma, they consisted for the most part of pamphlets and articles from such periodicals as Fortune, Ebony, and the Interracial Review.
became more pointed and it was possible for the Club to realize better its primary aim of educating people to approach racial problems from the principles of morality.  

Having assumed the responsibility of educating others, the members of the Club soon realized the essential importance of better preparing themselves to carry on their work. An immediate and very successful technique was a series of lectures sponsored by the Club. Through this medium, knowledgeable persons, eminent for their work in interracial problems, were given a forum at the Center. These speakers not only applied needed factual data but, more importantly, were able to suggest means best adapted for an organization such as the De Porres Club to carry its message to a larger public.

An outstanding speaker of this type was Mr. Leo Bohanen of the Omaha Urban League. Though the main focus of his speech was on Negro employment and housing restrictions in Omaha, he went further and outlined various ways by which the De Porres Club could extend its influence. Urging it to continue its program of guest

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3Minutes, Omaha De Porres Club, Nov. 17, 1947.
lectures and discussions based on important books and articles available in the library, he pointed out how the Club could have an impact in two important aspects of the interracial problem, the personal and the political.

On the personal level, he encouraged members to seek out the natural leaders of the Negro community—doctors, lawyers, and ministers—and meet them in a normal, natural situation. By such meetings, small groups of the Club could convey their awareness of the situation and willingness to help but could also receive a knowledge of the Negro previously unavailable to them.

Secondly, he suggested opportunities for group political action, an important function in the legislative process of a democratic society. Having read, discussed, and convinced themselves of the need, the members were urged by Bohanen to back impending legislation such as an anti-lynching law and a Fair Employment Practices law. Further the group was urged to conduct its own investigation of stores and public places to see what, if any, discrimination existed. If discrimination was substantiated, the Club should vocalize
its convictions to state and national representatives.\(^4\)

Historically the economic plight of the Negro is associated with industry's discriminatory attitude toward employment and apprenticeship training. First-hand information on this problem was given in an address by Mr. Marion Taylor, Industrial Secretary of the Omaha Urban League. Mr. Taylor and others were helpful in suggesting how such information might be best used for the objectives of the De Porres Club.\(^5\)

Pressure groups tend to be short-lived. Organized to meet a specific problem, they either solve the problem or are conquered by it. Because of the magnitude of the Negro problem, the De Porres Club faced the danger of being overcome by it. That it survived was in large part due to the influence and guidance of a man recognized and experienced in the field of interracial justice, Father John P. Markoe, S.J.

\(^4\)Ibid.

\(^5\)Ibid., March 15, 1948. Mr. Ralph Adams, local executive secretary for the NAACP, also spoke to the Club on the NAACP's history and activities. Furthermore, Father Austin Miller, S.J., an instructor at Creighton University, informed the members that education must play an important role in attempting to solve the interracial problem. Ibid., June 17, 1948.
Born in St. Paul, Minnesota, Father Markoe came from a family steeped in the military traditions of the country. His great-great-grandfather, Abram Markoe, founded and commanded the Philadelphia troops which escorted George Washington to take charge of the Colonial Army. An uncle, General Morgan, served on General Grant's staff and attended the surrender at Appomatox. With this heritage it is not strange that Father Markoe was appointed to West Point in 1910 and that one of his brothers, Francis, followed him there in 1912.

His rugged physique made Father Markoe a welcome addition to the Army football team. Distinguished by the number of future greats who played on the team such as Eisenhower and Bradley, sports enthusiasts know this as the team that met defeat on the day that Gus Dorais threw the first pass in football's history to Knute Rockne.

Graduating in 1914, Father Markoe had little time to recall his cadet days at the Point. Sent to the Arizona-Mexico border he became part of the contingent alerted by the beginning of the Mexican Revolution. He and several other officers had the unique experience
of commanding squadrons of Negro troops. Finally, after following Pershing in his futile search for the elusive Mexican bandit, Pancho Villa, Captain Markoe left the army and returned to Minnesota, where he worked in lumber and steel plants.

In February, 1917, John P. Markoe was received as a novice in the Society of Jesus at Florissant, Missouri. With one career already behind him and hardened by the realities of life, he was no ordinary Jesuit novice but rather a man deeply committed to a goal in life—the alleviation of suffering and discrimination from the lives of poverty-stricken Negroes. This dedication was formalized in 1917 when he and his younger brother William, who had preceded John into the novitiate, solemnly pledged themselves to spend their lives working for the Negro in the United States.6

Following ordination, Father Markoe commenced his apostolate among the Negroes at Saint Elizabeth's and Saint Malachy's parishes in St. Louis. He worked vigorously, calling on the sick, raising money for distressed

6See Appendix II for Pledge, p. 96.
families, and finding jobs for the unemployed whenever possible. The culmination of Father Markoe's work in St. Louis came in 1944, when after a protracted struggle involving many elements within the city, St. Louis University finally integrated its student body.

The struggle caused such friction that Church authorities requested Father Markoe to leave St. Louis. Thus in 1946 he came to Omaha. Shortly thereafter, in the fall of 1947, this Jesuit priest began guiding the Omaha De Porres Club.

His personality, beliefs, and convictions continually sustained the spirit of the De Porres Club. By inspiration and direction he instilled in the members a realization that racial discrimination was not a simple matter of economics nor of individual preference. He emphasized that segregation and discrimination are problems of right and wrong—violations of justice and charity. By so doing, Father Markoe led the members into a moral understanding of why they were involved. With all the moral force of his Christian convictions, Father Markoe insisted:
The white supremacy error is propagated through the propagation of lies. It is perpetuated despite the glaring and cruel fact that it compels its innocent victims to struggle through life economically handicapped, to get along as best they can on a non-living wage, to live in substandard, often unfit homes, depriving its victims of suitable educational opportunities and denying to them many of the cultural advantages of life. This evil fruit of the color line caused it to be a moral evil that perpetuates itself.7

To implement his moral convictions on racism, Father Markoe urged the group to combat the false mental attitudes of whites through practical living example. He convinced them that only by treating Negroes as part of the public could the natural and normal integration of whites and non-whites in all fields be attained.8

With this growth in knowledge and experience coupled with the esprit de corps imparted by Father Markoe, the Club expanded the activities of its Center in the heart of the Negro ghetto.9 Once it had established

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7Minutes, Omaha De Porres Club, Nov. 3, 1947.
8Ibid., Nov. 10, 1947.
its library and its usefulness as a meeting place for discussion groups, the Center soon became a focal point for more intimate contact with the Negro community. Club members began distributing food and clothing to the needy, found jobs for unemployed and frequently ventured into such neighborhood projects as renovating and repainting run-down houses.\textsuperscript{10}

At the Center the Club also held programs at stated times for children, at other times for adults. But Friday was perhaps the most stimulating evening of the week, for at that time the Center became a public forum at which qualified leaders in the religious, social, political, educational, and economic fields presented their viewpoints on the racial problems and on proposed solutions.\textsuperscript{11}

The Club was soon able to become more ambitious

\textsuperscript{10}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid. These various activities continued on at the Center for a period of about two years, after which time, due to numerous problems, the main one being keeping up the rent payments, the Club was forced to abandon the Center in October, 1950. Meetings after this time were held at the offices of \textit{The Omaha Star}, 2216 North 24th Street.
in its program of guest speakers, for in a short time it was able to sponsor two noted lecturers from outside the city. One was the outstanding humanitarian the Baroness Catherine de Hueck of Friendship House fame who gave a series of three very successful lectures.\textsuperscript{12}

The other lecture was presented by Walter White, general secretary of the NAACP. Because of the size of the expected crowd, Mr. White delivered his talk "Color Line Across the Globe" in the Tech High auditorium. He cited for the audience many examples of customs and even laws which denied the fundamental guarantees of the United States Constitution.\textsuperscript{13} He applied this to the international scene and showed how by our unjust treatment of minority groups we appeared hypocritical in the

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid. Club president Denny Holland had observed the work done by Friendship House in Chicago: with admiration, he said of the Baroness and her work: A firm believer in the principle of the "Brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God," the Baroness has dedicated her life to the doing of works of mercy out of her great love for God. She has worked among the poor and oppressed in both Canada and the United States, and has done much work to spread devotion to Blessed Martin De Porres. She has fought valiantly against communism. Friendship House with branches in Canada, Chicago, and New York and also a farm in Wisconsin, has been in existence for ten years. Most of the work is carried on by volunteers. Minutes, April 26, 1948.

\textsuperscript{13}The Omaha Star, November 17, 1950, p. 1.
eyes of the world. White listed some steps to be taken in the drive for total equality and forcefully summarized his talk: "Your ancestors came to America on the Mayflower, mine on a slave ship. But we are all in the same boat now. That boat at present is floundering."

Another innovation took place on April 10, 1949, when the Club sponsored an Interracial Youth Rally at Tech High to "educate some of the young people of Omaha on the facts and consequences of racial prejudice." The technique of the rally was used not only to educate but primarily to involve the youth of Omaha in the most serious social problem of the age. Consequently, Mr. Kermit Hansen, director of youth activities for the Omaha World-Herald and Mr. Leo Bohanen of the Urban League very quickly outlined the problems of race prejudice and discrimination in Omaha. But the highlight was a panel discussion led by De Porres Club members


\[15\] Ibid.

\[16\] Minutes, Omaha De Porres Club, March 31, 1949.
which quickly involved the whole audience.\textsuperscript{17} Thus the rally not only served as an educating medium but it stirred up enthusiasm which looked to the creation of new groups entering the interracial-justice field.\textsuperscript{18}

Constantly seeking new means to spread its message in order to reveal the evils of racism to the people of Omaha, the Club soon hit upon the use of the social drama. On December 9, 1949, it staged with phenomenal success the Reverend George H. Dunne's powerful anti-discrimination play \textit{Trial by Fire}.\textsuperscript{19} The play dramatized the true story of the hushed-up murder of a Negro family who perished at the hands of a white mob of "vigilantes" who burned their California home during the Christmas season of 1945.

The impact on the audience which first viewed the play was powerful. Repeated requests were made for another performance.\textsuperscript{20} The De Porres Club again presented

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17}Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{18}Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{19}\textit{Irr.}, "Omaha De Porres Center," p. 26.
\item \textsuperscript{20}\textit{The Omaha Star}, March 30, 1950, p. 1.
\end{itemize}
the play on March 31, 1950, this time in cooperation with the Mayor's Human Relations Committee. The cast composed for the most part of De Porres members, was directed by Club members Margaret St. Clair and Denny Holland.21

Impressed by momentary success, the local press acclaimed the production of Trial by Fire. The Omaha Guide hailed it as a "magnificent success."22 The World Herald called it a force which "struck a blow with the facts of racial bias."23 Speaking of the hard-hitting impact of the play, Denny Holland enthusiastically commented:

Trial by Fire struck a spark. May that spark be fanned into a blaze of righteous indignation and continue to burn until the last traces of racial intolerance have been

21The Omaha Guide, April 8, 1950, p. 3. Omaha Mayor Glenn Cunningham, whose Committee on Human Relations co-sponsored the play, remarked before the curtain went up that this documentary play had a powerful message for all the citizens of Omaha. "My Committee is proud to present this play," he said, "and before the evening is out you will be glad that you came." Ibid.

22Ibid.

23Evening World-Herald (Omaha), April 1, 1950, p. 16.
purged from the hearts of men.\textsuperscript{24}

Unfortunately for the cause of racial justice in Omaha, Holland was too optimistic.

As a result of this extensive program of education, the De Porres members gained first-hand familiarity with the many facets of the racial problem. This knowledge was not abstract but was personalized through direct endeavor, experience, and contact with the ghetto and the individuals who lived there. It was a knowledge well fitted to prepare members to deal with the actual situations involving segregation and discrimination.

Jim Crowism was the first facet of the interracial problem which the Club attacked. Ironically enough, it was found in the Roman Catholic Church. The Church in Omaha at this time practiced \textit{de facto} Jim Crowism by sanctioning the operation of Saint Benedict's mission as a separate church and school for Omaha's Negro Catholics.

Saint Benedict's mission, located in the heart of the 'black belt' at 25th and Grant Streets, was founded in December, 1918, by Father Francis B. Cassily, S. J., Instructor in Religion on the Creighton University

\textsuperscript{24}\textit{The Omaha Guide}, April 8, 1950, p. 3.
faculty. Having discovered a large group of underprivileged people in North Omaha, who in this instance were Negroes, Father Cassily advertised a "Mission Conducted For All Interested In Catholicism." In explaining the original motives for founding Saint Benedict's, Father John Killoren, S.J., pastor of Saint Benedict's for eighteen years, recently commented:

The only reason there was a Saint Benedict's was so that a regular Catholic body could be built up among the colored population and also because these people might have been ignored in the parishes in which they resided. In other words, the various parishes ignored these people.

Intended to serve Negroes in a specific area, it was gradually expected that Negroes from all parts of Omaha would attend Saint Benedict's. Thus the mission served to perpetuate what was a community pattern of concentration. It was a case of Christian ideals inadvertently accepting segregation.

25 Saint Benedict's Parish Records.

26 Interview with Father John Killoren, Pastor of Saint Benedict's Parish, November 16, 1966. Italics mine.
Originally the De Porres Club became concerned with this situation and the evils it engendered following the visit of Mr. Robert Hollins to the Center. A Negro and the father of eight, Hollins informed them of his plight. One of his girls would graduate from the eighth grade at Saint Benedict's in June. He wanted his daughter to continue her Catholic education but he feared she would not be admitted to Sacred Heart High School despite the fact that the family lived within the confines of that parish.

Since the Hollins family did live in Sacred Heart parish, the De Porres Club decided it was proper that the girl be admitted to Sacred Heart High School. If she were refused because of being a Negro, then the Club felt that the facts of this and other cases should be reported to the Archbishop.

To discover the working policy of the Catholic Church toward Negro Catholics, Club members made personal calls on city pastors to ascertain their attitude.

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27 Minutes, Omaha De Porres Club, February 16, 1948.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
toward admitting non-whites into parish schools. A few of the pastors resented what they considered an intrusion into their private business. For example, Father William Corboy, S.J., pastor of Saint John's, the parish south of Saint Benedict's mission, said: "I will accept them if I want to, I will refuse if I choose." Father Corboy refused to be put on record as taking a definite stand. Father Joseph A. Osdick, pastor of Sacred Heart, the parish north of Saint Benedict's mission, welcomed Negroes at Mass and Holy Communion but would not register them as parishioners because they had a parish of their own. Father Osdick added that, he "would not want to deprive the Negroes of the support which the mission received from the Negro

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30 Ibid., February 23, 1948. The Club took the results of these surveys to Father Paul Schneider, Superintendent of Catholic Schools. Ibid.

31 Ibid.
and Indian Collection sponsored by his Church.\textsuperscript{32}

But as the Negroes in Omaha during the late 1940's were moving steadily north from the area of Saint Benedict's into the neighboring territory of Sacred Heart Parish, it was this parish where the Jim Crow practices within the Church were challenged.\textsuperscript{33} A change in policy

\textsuperscript{32}Ibid. It should be pointed out that the existence of a black belt "Jim Crow" Catholic Church was by no means peculiar to the City of Omaha. This is evident for instance by what the situation was in Chicago. According to Drake and Clayton, a study of the Catholic Church in that city in 1940 revealed: Three Black Belt Catholic Churches had been set aside as "Negro" churches and colored Catholics, no matter where they lived in the city, were forced to hold membership in one or the other of these churches. They could attend Mass at other churches, but deaths and marriages were to be solemnized in the Jim Crow churches. There were several cases of Negro children who were refused enrollment in the nearest parochial school, although this was a violation of canon law. St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Clayton, \textit{Black Metropolis} (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), I, pp. 196-97.

\textsuperscript{33}Minutes, Omaha De Porres Club, November 10, 1947 and November 17, 1947. Concerning Sacred Heart Parish, De Porres members also checked on a restrictive covenant pledge barring Negroes from renting or buying houses in the vicinity of that parish. They checked to see if the occupants had signed, or been asked to sign, such a pledge. The interviewers found several families, some of which signed the petition, others who refused to sign.
at Sacred Heart did take place, due in part to the steadfast urging of the De Porres Club. The announcement that two colored girls would be accepted at Sacred Heart at the beginning of the fall term highlighted the Club meeting of May 31, 1948. Two months later, Archbishop Gerald T. Bergan of Omaha informed a committee of De Porres members that he would not stand for segregation on the basis of color.

The next significant gain for the De Porres Club in its work to end the segregation of Omaha's Catholics came when Saint Benedict's finally became a parish. After the study which preceded the change had been made, Father John Markoe, S.J., Father John Killoren, S.J., and Whitney Young of the Urban League drew up the territorial boundaries taking parts of the neighboring parishes of Sacred Heart, Saint John's, Holy Family, and Saint Cecilia's Cathedral to form the parish of Saint Benedict's.

By directive of Archbishop Bergan, who had long been especially interested in Saint Benedict's, the

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34 Ibid., May 31, 1948.


36 Saint Benedict's Parish Records.
mission was established as the parish of Saint Benedict's with geographical boundaries. There could be no misinterpreting the wording of the Archbishop's directive on Easter Sunday of 1953:

All people residing within the boundaries are to belong to the newly-erected Saint Benedict's parish; and all people residing outside this territory, are to belong to that particular parish in whose boundaries they might reside.

Even more serious than parish segregation was the situation that existed in housing. Residential segregation, an extremely harmful form of isolation, lies at the very core of the racial problem in the North. Many whites stereotyped Negroes as undesirable neighbors endangering property values. To stop the outward push of the Negro from the ghetto and into white neighborhoods, various types of legalistic techniques such as zoning ordinances and restrictive covenants were adopted. When these failed, the whites in threatened fringe areas hastened to move out. Gunnar Myrdal analyzed the way in which the fear of becoming isolated in an all-Negro

37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
neighborhood operates to reinforce other aspects of the struggle for living space:

When a few Negro families do come into a white neighborhood, some more white families move away. Other Negroes hasten to take their places, because the existing Negro neighborhoods are overcrowded due to segregation. This constant movement of the Negroes into white neighborhoods makes the bulk of the white residents feel that their neighborhood is doomed to be predominantly Negro, and they move out—with their attitudes toward the Negro reinforced. Yet if there were no segregation, this wholesale invasion would not have occurred. But because it does occur, segregation attitudes are increased, and the vigilant pressure to stall the Negroes at the borderline is kept up.40

This same phenomenon was occurring in Omaha in the 1940's. As the Negro population of the city increased greatly during these years, more and more Negroes moved into "fringe areas," areas which are today contained within the expanded ghetto. One of these new residents was Woodrow Morgan, a World War II Air Force veteran.41

40 Ibid.

41 Arnold Forster and Benjamin R. Epstein, The Troublemakers (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1952), p. 273. Morgan had been shot down over Germany and spent several months in a Nazi prisoner-of-war camp. Ibid.
Morgan purchased a home in the fall of 1950, from a white owner, at 1822 North 31st Street. As soon as the sale became known, there was an ugly reaction. Neighbors protested. Morgan received threatening letters. Furious telephone calls were made to the white man who had sold him the house, to the financing corporation, and to the real estate agent who had negotiated the sale. Neighbors threw stones through the windows and threatened bodily harm to Morgan and his family if they dared to move in.42

Whitney Young of the Omaha Urban League brought

42 Ibid., p. 274. Father George H. Dunne's telling comment concerning a similar incident in Los Angeles is equally applicable to the reaction of Omaha whites. "[These events] should remove any lingering doubts about the unfitness of Negroes to live in a white neighborhood. It is simply a matter of different levels of cultural refinement, of standards of social behavior. It should be sufficiently obvious that people like Mr. and Mrs. Wilson, who have not as yet acquired such refined social graces as the art of leaving dead rats on the neighbor's doorstep can hardly be assimilated into this kind of neighborhood. Let them stay over on Central Avenue [a Negro section] until through education they have raised themselves to a comparable cultural level. When they have learned to flood their neighbors' home, to leave dead rats on their neighbors' front porch, or better still, to throw dead rats through their neighbors' open windows, they will be better equipped to meet the stringent standards of the white neighborhood." Rev. George H. Dunne, S.J., "And Who Is My Neighbor?", The Commonweal, (October 6, 1950), p. 624.
the Morgan family matter to the attention of the De Porres Club. Young also informed the group that the Omaha World-Herald refused to print anything about the matter. The De Porres members, in turn, decided that they would meet the issue in their own way. 43

On the morning of September 27th when the moving van was expected at the Morgan house, Father Markoe and Denny Holland sat on the porch of the vacant house. Several neighbors walked by. They asked if the priest was looking for the old tenants. Father Markoe replied: "No, we're waiting for the new owners. We're helping them move in." When the moving van approached, a group of young Negroes and white men, members of the De Porres Club, alighted and helped carry in the furniture. The neighbors, ready to take threatening action, stood by, astounded to see whites and Negroes working together with their own spiritual leader first among them. There was no incident. 44

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43 Minutes, Omaha De Porres Club, September 25, 1950. Speaking of this bold effort toward neighborhood integration, Forster and Epstein declare: "There is an inspiring story—with a moral of its own—to be found in the experience of one American family in the City of Omaha. In a way, it symbolizes the greater battle that must be fought." Forster and Epstein, p. 274.

44 Forster and Epstein, p. 274.
But the De Porres Club did not stop with moving the Morgans in. To pave the way for a more friendly reception of the family, the Club sent a delegation of its more mature members to make calls on and try to reason with the people of this previously all-white neighborhood. In less than two weeks, the hostility toward the Morgans melted away, and Father Markoe was able to report to the Club that the family was having no trouble.

Of this particular incident, Father Markoe recalls: "The psychological effect of our presence there was just what was needed."

Several months after the Morgans moved into the neighborhood, one of their children had a birthday party. The children of the neighborhood were invited and all of them attended. In time the Morgans found themselves to be popular neighbors who were not just tolerated.

45 Minutes, Omaha De Porres Club, October 2, 1950.
46 Ibid., October 9, 1950.
47 Interview with Father Markoe, June 27, 1966.
48 Interview with Denny Holland, June 30, 1966.
Due to the efforts of the De Porres Club, a Negro family was able to move into a decent house and thus escape living in Omaha's crowded ghetto. The Morgans, with the aid of a few individuals who recognized the moral question involved, were indeed much more fortunate than the average Negro family. They were able in this instance to exercise their rights as American citizens to move about unhampered. Unfortunately, the Morgan episode is all too rare.

In aiding this family to secure a decent home, the De Porres Club was responding to an individual case of racial injustice. Because of the magnitude of the Negro problem in Omaha at this time, however, the De Porres Club, unlike later groups working exclusively for open housing, was unable to restrict its full energies in this single facet of the interracial problem. Having achieved success in this instance, the Club—dedicated to attacking Jim Crow practices wherever they were to be found—felt compelled to act in other areas.

Employing the same direct action techniques by which it fought the evils of Jim Crow in the areas of education and housing, the De Porres Club contended with
segregation and discrimination in public recreation, amusement, and eating places. The Club's members like those of another student-centered group operating years later, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, attacked the double moral standard which served to separate their city into two societies. It was simply unjust for any public facility or business open to the public not to serve any member of the entire public. The moral position taken by the De Porres Club and by later civil rights groups is captured in the words of Thomas P. Lewis:

There is probably no expectation, with or without a legal basis, which is more firmly established than the expectation of the average person that he will be served in places of public accommodation. The expectation is centered in the private enterprise system which created the accommodations they exist to serve. It would be absurd in the extreme to imagine that a place built and designed to serve the people would be used in a way inconsistent with the use which will allow it to survive and prosper.49

In contending with the traditional order in their society, an order whose rules they had no part in making,

rules which did not fit the circumstances, the De Porres Club at times circumvented the usual processes for change. Hence just as 19th and 20th century laborers resorted to a strike—a tool appropriate to their circumstances—even though it was sometimes illegal, the De Porres Club, as did later civil rights workers, resorted to the sit-in, the march and the boycott. 50

While pursuing equality of treatment and opportunity for all Omahans, the De Porres Club investigated and took action against two glaring situations involving discrimination in the city's recreational facilities, specifically at the Morton Park swimming pool and at the city's largest roller skating rink. In the first instance Negroes were refused the right to swim at Morton Park pool and when two Negro boys tried to enter this public pool they were physically assaulted. Learning of these incidents, the De Porres Club, working through its moderator Father Markoe and the City Parks and Recreation Superintendent, Ralph B. McClintock, invited the religious leaders of the area along with representatives of the C.I.O., the Q Street Merchants, the Police Department, and the Urban League to gather at City Hall and discuss

not only the Morton Park situation but the problem of segregation and discrimination in general. 51

At the close of this meeting the De Porres Club representatives and these community leaders concurred in the opinion that the "law," presumably referring to Nebraska's Civil Rights Statute, should be enforced. As eighty-five per cent of the people in the neighborhood of Morton Park were Catholics, it was also suggested that the Parks Commissioner contact the Archbishop and inform him of the situation. 52

The De Porres Club next challenged the overt discrimination practiced by the management of the city's largest roller skating rink, the Crosstown Roller Rink. Informed by groups of young Negroes that they were not permitted to skate at this rink, Club representatives met with the manager of the establishment, Mr. Ralph Fox, on several occasions to encourage him to admit Negroes. 53 Unable to sway Fox from this unlawful and unjust position, the De Porres Club forced the issue when a mixed group

51 Minutes, Omaha De Porres Club, June 21, 1948.

52 Ibid. Father Markoe believed the Morton Park incidents to be the working of Divine Providence in that they emphasized the need for the organization of a Mayor's Human Relations Commission. Ibid.

of its members went to the rink to skate. The white member of the group was sold a ticket but the Negroes were denied admittance. Thereupon, one of the Negroes, English Webb, Jr., made a complaint and had a warrant sworn out for the arrest of Fox.

The case was disposed of eight months after it was first brought into court. Following the hearings, Judge Patrick J. Lynch of municipal court found Fox, the Crosstown manager, guilty and fined him $25.00. Fox's attorney, William J. Holz, Jr., had delivered the preposterous plea that skating rinks were not places of amusement and therefore not covered by the State Civil Rights Law! He said: "The Nebraska Civil Rights Statute was passed in 1893 before there were skating rinks and could not have meant to include them."

Later when the case came up in District Court, Fox's attorney requested a jury trial for his client but later dropped this request. Fox then abandoned his

54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
appeal before the case came before the District Judge. The lower court's decision of a $25.00 fine hence remained binding. In Omaha, discrimination was not only illegal, it was also inexpensive.

Finally on Tuesday, July 21, 1953, the Cross-town Rink admitted Negroes. This submission ended a year of vigorous action on the part of the De Porres Club against the discriminatory policies of this roller rink. The Club was obliged to spend much time and effort to achieve rights for Negroes ostensibly already theirs by law.

Successful to a degree in attacking Jim Crowism in the area of recreation and amusement, the De Porres Club challenged the discriminatory policies of many public eating places. In order to discover the policy of the city's restaurant managers toward Negroes, the group carried on an extensive program of testing. On numerous occasions Club members were faced by discrimination quite by accident when they gathered socially after meeting hours. Confronted by a refusal of service and failing

57 Ibid.

in a friendly discussion of the matter, they would gently remind the proprietors that Nebraska had a State Law forbidding such discrimination. When this failed to bring the desired result, a member of the Club would have a warrant sworn out for the arrest of the offending proprietor. Of the few court cases that resulted, some were won by the Club while others were dismissed. Discrimination was hard to prove legally.

In one interesting case the proprietor of the Cuming Street Restaurant, 40th and Cuming Street, had two members, Bill Reid, a Negro, and Chet Anderson, a white, arrested for vociferously protesting the serving of Reid's order on a dirty paper plate while Anderson was served with chinaware. The case reached the court and the judge found the accused members of the Club not guilty and lectured the offending proprietor about the facts of Nebraska's civil rights statute.

On another occasion, Father Markoe and some of the De Porres members were asked by the proprietor to

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60 Minutes, Omaha De Porres Club, October 29, 1951.

leave his establishment. They held firm and would not move until they were served. Like the four Negro college students who years later at Greensboro, North Carolina, sat down at the all-white lunch counter and refused to move until they were served, this mixed group asserted their independence, expressed their freedom, made their demonstration. In taking this stand, the De Porres members were employing a pioneer technique for fighting racial discrimination, the sit-in. 62

62 Interview with Father Markoe, July 16, 1966. Never an official part of De Porres Club business, the account of the events which made up this demonstration is Father Markoe's own: Some of the De Porres members, colored and white, dropped into Dixon's Top-Hat Restaurant after a Club meeting. There were twenty-five or thirty of them. They split up and sat at different tables. It was not long, however, before the waiter called Father Markoe over to see the manager. The manager asked him who they were, and he told him that they were members of the De Porres Club and that they had just finished having a meeting at Creighton University. The manager then said that he did not serve colored because he would lose all of his white trade. After telling the manager that the group did not intend to leave until they were served, the manager suggested cutting the colored members of the group off from the crowd and putting them on an old band platform. Father Markoe told him to go ahead and serve the group where they were. After a short wait the mixed group was served. While Father Markoe walked out of the restaurant, the manager again called him aside and accused the priest of ruining his business. Father Markoe replied that the man was not ruined and that his business would only increase because of what he had done.
The De Porres Club thus challenged with some degree of success racial discrimination as it existed locally in the Roman Catholic Church, housing, recreational facilities, and eating places. While continuing to carry on its business meetings and taking advantage of every opportunity to dislodge Jim Crow practices, the Club decided to call on local business leaders to see what could be done about providing more equal job opportunities for Negroes.63 De Porres members first of all interviewed personnel officials of local industries and of the transportation system.64 At Father Markoe's suggestion, they set up an Industrial Committee to collect information helpful for those making the calls.65

The De Porres Club was more persistent in working against racial discrimination in employment than it had been in the areas of housing and recreation. This was probably the result of immaturity. In their early struggles against racial bigotry, the Club members evidenced energy and determination coupled with the naivete that is characteristic of the novice crusader. Much of their

63 Irr., "Omaha De Porres Center," p. 25.
64 Minutes, Omaha De Porres Club, March 8, 1948.
65 Ibid., October 4, 1948.
early success, minor though it might have been, resulted more from boldness and energy than from organized planning. But these efforts paid off as the members of the Club benefited from their experiences and came to age as reformers.

The fight against discrimination in employment was much more thoroughly planned and carried out. The Club resorted to demonstrations of all types—boycotts, picketing, and mass meetings. It also made use of all news media and the influence of religious leaders to gain the ends of fair employment for all regardless of color. Mr. Mac Gothard, general manager of the Omaha Coca-Cola plant, who in 1951 was forced to submit to a De Porres Club boycott, perhaps expresses best the impact of this Club in view of the civil rights movement of the sixties:

If there is anything that I can say about the De Porres Club, it is that they were ahead of their time. The methods and pressures they used were not thought of in those days. I was shocked by their tactics. I was ignorant of the whole thing. If confronted by such a group today, my hair would not bristle upon my back as it did fifteen years ago. 66

66 Interview with Mr. Mac Gothard, Manager of the Omaha Coca-Cola plant, November 2, 1966.
Of the campaigns which the De Porres Club waged for fair employment, four stand out. These campaigns, waged against the Omaha Coca-Cola Bottling Company, the Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway Company, the Reed Ice Cream Company, and the Omaha School Board are the subject of the following chapter.
Despite the seriousness of other forms of prejudice discussed previously, job discrimination hit the Omaha Negro hardest. Living at a bare subsistence level, educational and intellectual development was so meager it deprived the Negro of the hope of taking his rightful place in the community.

Though the ideal of "fair (nondiscriminatory) employment" had been legally achieved by some states in the country when the De Porres Club entered the field, Nebraska had no legislation governing this situation. Therefore, the De Porres Club acted on the moral assumption that Omaha employers ought to pursue policies consonant with this ideal.

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1. Facts on a Fair Employment Practices Law for Nebraska. Distributed by the Nebraska Citizen's Committee for Fair Employment Practices. February, 1950, p. 3. Massachusetts, New York, and New Jersey were states with Fair Employment Laws at this time.

2. The De Porres Club, as a cooperating organization of the Nebraska Citizen's Committee for Fair Employment legislation, urged legislative enactment which would prevent employers, labor unions, and employment agencies from discriminating against workers solely because of their race, color, religion, national origin or ancestry.
It began by conducting four campaigns against discriminatory hiring practices. The Club focused on the policies of the Omaha Coca-Cola Bottling Company, the Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway Company, the Reed Ice Cream Company, and the Omaha School Board.

The Coca-Cola Campaign

In September, 1950, the De Porres Club voted to investigate the employment policies of the Omaha Coca-Cola Bottling Company. Direct information from several Negroes, confirmed by the Urban League, made the Club aware of the company's discriminatory hiring policies. In view of this several De Porres members formed a committee and called on the manager of the Coca-Cola plant, Mac Gothard. Gothard refused to discuss the issue.

Because members were engaged in other activities, the Club took no further action for about seven months. Then in April, 1951, Holland reported, after speaking

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3 Minutes, Omaha De Porres Club, September 25, 1950.

4 Interview with Denny Holland, July 14, 1966.

5 Minutes, October 2, 1950. Gothard's only comment was that the hiring policies of the company had been established by Mr. James Findley, the company's major stockholder. Acting on this information, the Club sent Findley a letter asking that the company's policies be changed. He neither answered the letter nor was he in any way later involved in the issue. Ibid.
with Gothard again, that Coca-Cola had refused to hire Negro route salesmen but would consider hiring two Negroes as plant workers.6

The committee made another call on Gothard, scoring a minor breakthrough. He told the members he would interview Negroes for possible employment when warm weather brought increased production and extra help would be needed. Because success seemed imminent, the Club decided not to bring pressure to bear on the company.7

At the end of April, the Club learned that Gothard had as yet hired no Negroes. In view of this, the group discussed methods to bring public pressure upon Gothard and decided to call on him once more.8 To formalize their demands, they sent him the following letter:

We of the Omaha De Porres Club feel that the Omaha Coca-Cola Bottling Company's policy of denying Negroes equal employment opportunities has far too long stood in complete violation

6 Ibid., April 9, 1951.
7 Ibid., April 14, 1951.
8 Ibid., April 30, 1951.
of the American ideal of equal opportunity.

We have had many conferences with you over a long period of time about this policy. At our last conference, we agreed to wait until April 30, 1951. We told you if the situation had not changed by then we would do all in our power to get people to stop buying Coca-Cola until changes were made.

You told me [Denny Holland] over the phone on April 30, 1951, that there had been no change. We therefore will proceed with our program of education to let people know of the situation and stop supporting discrimination with their money.

We ask for a public statement from your company stating that employment there is open at all levels, to able and qualified persons regardless of skin color and that to implement this statement you immediately hire some Negroes according to their abilities. You have told us that with warm weather you hire more people, thus you can hire some Negroes without affecting the jobs of your present employees whose rights we want protected also.

We trust that you will recognize that this request is one in accord with the American Creed of equality regardless of race, creed, or color.9

The De Porres Club got no satisfaction, not even a formal reply from Gothard. This led the Club to mobilize public pressure against Coca-Cola. Two-thousand handbills urging Omahans to "refuse to support discrimination by not buying Coca-Cola" were printed and distributed throughout the city. Members picketed the Coca-Cola

9Letter to Mr. Mac Gothard from Denny Holland, May 1, 1951.
plant located in the Negro ghetto at 3200 North 30th Street. Furthermore, a De Porres member circulated a petition to the businessmen on North 24th Street asking them to stop selling Coca-Cola until the hiring policy was changed.\textsuperscript{10} Within a week, forty-three persons whose businesses ranged from laundries to gasoline stations signed the petition.\textsuperscript{11}

After about a month and a half of active campaigning, Denny Holland announced at a June 12 meeting that the Coca-Cola Bottling Company had yielded to the boycott. At the Urban League Office, Gothard met with Whitney Young and Marion Taylor of the Urban League and Miss Tessie Edwards and Holland of the De Porres Club. At this time Gothard made the public statement that the policy of the Coca-Cola plant had been changed: two qualified Negroes had been employed and in the future, employment would be open at all levels regardless of race, creed, or color.\textsuperscript{12} With this news, the Club agreed

\textsuperscript{10}Minutes, May 14, 1951. (For a copy of the handbill—see Appendix III, p. 97.)

\textsuperscript{11}\textit{Ibid.}, May 21, 1951.

\textsuperscript{12}\textit{Ibid.}, June 12, 1951.
that its demands had been met and consequently the boycott was ended. The Club then notified the participating merchants of the boycott's termination in an open letter in the *Omaha Star* and through personal contact.\(^{13}\)

The De Porres Club boycott of the Omaha Coca-Cola Bottling Company was successful. The very unfavorable publicity that the boycott and other aspects of the campaign brought to the company proved to be a compelling factor in changing its hiring policy. Of the company's submission to the De Porres Club demands, Mac Gothard recently commented: "My concern at that time was one of public relations. We suffered no financial loss that

\(^{13}\)Ibid. The following article on the De Porres Club campaign against the Omaha Coca-Cola Bottling Company is taken from the June, 1951 issue of the *Interracial Review*, a national magazine published monthly by the Catholic Interracial Council in New York City: For a month now, the Omaha De Porres Club has been boycotting a soft drink company and its product because of that company's reluctance to hire Negroes. In the first week of June, the company yielded by hiring two young Negro workers in its plant. By enlisting themselves wholeheartedly in the cause of social justice and charity, the De Porres Club has advanced that cause not only in Omaha, but in all the world. We have advanced in their advance. And, like the De Porres Club, we must continue that advance until justice is achieved not merely in token but in truth.
I know of." Obviously, one who wishes to conduct a profitable business must be concerned with "public relations and good moral standing." Even though the De Porres Club boycott did not seriously hurt the Coca-Cola Company, Mr. Gothard apparently feared damage. No doubt, likewise, the Club had successfully appealed to Mr. Gothard's better nature.

Even without further pressure following the 1951 campaign of the Club, the ratio of Negro employees at the Omaha Coca-Cola plant up to 1967 corresponded to the ratio of the population of the community. Of the seventy employees there, seven were Negroes. One wonders, however, if this ratio would exist, if the bottling plant were not located in the ghetto.

14 Interview with Mr. Mac Gothard, November 2, 1966. This is evident considering the fact that the Coca-Cola Company sought to average one account for every 125 people. At this rate, there would have been approximately two-thousand Omaha Coca-Cola accounts in 1951. The number of accounts which the De Porres Club succeeded in nullifying may have been noticed but probably would not have proved economically crucial to the Omaha Coca-Cola Bottling Company. Ibid.

15 Ibid.
The Street Railway Company Campaign

The second major campaign waged by the De Porres Club for fair employment was against the policies of the Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway Company. Three years before beginning this effort, De Porres representatives had met with Street Railway Company officials to discuss the possibilities of the company employing Negro drivers; these officials told them that the company would not hire Negroes. Although De Porres members obtained many signatures on a petition asking that the company change its policy, a company official informed the Club that the petition would not be accepted.\(^{16}\)

Thus thwarted, the De Porres Club launched an all-out effort in August, 1951 to place Negro drivers with the company.\(^{17}\) Club members carried picket signs and posters throughout the area served by the Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway Company\(^{18}\) and in front of the company's offices located in the Service Life Building at 19th and Harney Streets.\(^{19}\) In addition to this,

\(^{16}\) Minutes, October 10, 1949.

\(^{17}\) *Ibid.*, August 6, 1951.


the Club distributed thousands of handbills in all
sections of Omaha urging people to protest the hiring
practices of the Street Railway Company. 20 "If you
must ride," the handbills said, "protest by using 18
pennies." 21 Thousands of Omahans also received post-
cards urging them to join the campaign. 22 Furthermore,
representatives of the De Porres Club contacted a num-
ber of social and civic clubs and spoke to various
church congregations about the Street Railway Company
campaign. 23 The most publicized part of the campaign
was a mass meeting at Zion Baptist Church on December 14,
1951.

At this rally, the Club made explicit the history
of the Street Railway Company's refusal to consider hir-
ing Negroes. In addition to this, several qualified
Negroes who had applied for driving positions were intro-
duced and a report was given on a survey of other cities
regarding the employment of Negro bus drivers. In con-
trast to the situation in Omaha, Denny Holland, president

21 Handbill (for a copy of the handbill—see Appendix
IV, p. 98). The current adult fare was 18 cents.
22 Minutes, April 14, 1952.
23 Ibid., June 9, 1952.
of the Club, pointed out that Negroes were employed as bus drivers in Tulsa, Denver, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and Minneapolis. After announcing the De Porres Club's intention of continuing action against the Street Railway Company, President Denny Holland closed the meeting with a prayer, and State Senator John Adams sought to heighten the Club's self-confidence with a cryptic: "I rather think you will succeed."

After the December 14 rally, the Club continued its campaign by contacting churches, labor unions, and other city-wide organizations informing them about the situation.

A further development in the campaign came when the Club met with Roy Wilkins, national administrator of the NAACP, and discussed the Street Railway campaign with him. Wilkins thought that the Club was doing just

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25 Ibid. The De Porres Club's program of intended action included: sending letters of protest to the Street Railway Board of Directors; informing the public of the outcome; presenting the facts to the Omaha city commissioners for investigation, and moving appropriately. Ibid.

26 Minutes, February 11, May 19, June 9, and April 14, 1952.
about all it could by informing Omahans of the situation and urging them to protest.\textsuperscript{27}

In spring, 1952, the Club sent a representative to a State Railway Commission hearing on a fare increase proposed by the Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway Company.\textsuperscript{28} Despite the representative's objections, the Commission said it had no authority under state law to question the company's hiring policy.\textsuperscript{29}

After this setback, the Club recommended to the Mayor's Committee on Human Relations that it urge the Mayor to support a \textit{strong} Fair Employment Practices Ordinance in Omaha, and mentioned the Club's Street Railway campaign. It also recommended that the Mayor's Committee do all in its power to urge the Street Railway Company to change its hiring policy.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{27}Ibid., April 28, 1952.
\textsuperscript{28}Ibid., May 5, 1952.
\textsuperscript{29}Ibid., May 12, 1952.
\textsuperscript{30}Ibid., June 9, 1952. Acting on this recommendation, the Mayor's Committee on Human Relations advised the Mayor to introduce to the City Commissioners a Fair Employment Practices Ordinance which included all city employees. \textit{Ibid.}, June 16, 1952.
To support this, Miss Mildred Brown, owner and publisher of the Omaha Star, representing the De Porres Club, appeared before the Mayor and City Council and urged them to take strong measures against the Street Railway Company's hiring policy. Miss Brown said at the meeting:

If our boys can drive jeeps, tanks, and jet planes in Korea, in the fight to save democracy, make democracy work at home. Make it work in Omaha. I say to you, your honor, the mayor, if the tram company will not hire Negroes as drivers we prevail on you to remove the franchise of the bus company.31

The De Porres Club meantime confronted other problems. Consequently, it was not until August, 1954 that the Club saw the Street Railway Company's employment policy changed. In the city ordinance granting the company a franchise to maintain and operate a motor bus and street transportation system in Omaha for thirty years, sub-section 36 stated: "In the Company's employment relations there shall be no discrimination on

31The Omaha Star, June 20, 1952, p. 1.
account of race, color, or religion." In a referendum on November 2, 1954, the people of Omaha accepted this franchise and it became effective as of April 3, 1955.

Of this change in the transportation company's policy, effected through a franchise provision, Holland contends: "We of the De Porres Club were very surprised. We did not know that there was a franchise possibility."

The links between the De Porres Club efforts and the new franchise, with its key hiring policy sub-section, are difficult to establish. Warren Swigart, one of the city commissioners who voted on the franchise, recalls that Negro groups wrote to the commissioners asking them

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32 Records of the City of Omaha. Ordinance No. 18119. Although the old franchise had a number of years to run, the city was switching to a traffic system which called for the use of one-way streets. Since streetcar lines could not be easily converted to one-way operation, the CO&CB Street Railway Company found itself in the position of having to convert to an all-bus operation. Before making the heavy investment necessary to replace the remaining streetcar lines with buses, the company felt it necessary to obtain a new franchise which would guarantee its operation much beyond the 1958 expiration date.

33 Ibid.

34 Interview with Denny Holland, October 27, 1966.
to do something about the employment policy of the Street Railway Company. "When we inserted the non-discrimination clause in the franchise, we knew it sounded good," he said. "But at the same time, we thought that the Street Railway Company might try to circumvent it." Former city commissioners Walter X. Spellman and William R. Milner, both of whom voted for passage of the Street Railway franchise, recall they had heard that people wanted something done about the employment of the bus company. "When the non-discrimination motion came before us," they said, "we voted for it because we felt it was the right thing to do. We were never pressured." Despite Milner and Spellman's comment, however, it may be well to note that it is a time-honored political tactic to deny outside influence precisely when the politician is responding to it. In this incident, there definitely was pressure, and it came from the De Porres members.

36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
The role of the Club in this case is possibly best expressed by Holland: "I think it would be reasonable to say that the Club succeeded in stirring up the case."40 Obviously, the mentality of the city's and transportation company's officials changed on this issue. That the De Porres Club had a part in bringing this about is evident. Even so, the monumental decision of the Supreme Court on school segregation, handed down shortly before the franchise came up for renewal, must also have been a factor in urging this change.

The Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway Company, its employment policy altered by sub-section 36 of the new franchise, did not hesitate to hire Negroes. From that time on, they were continually hired as drivers by the company.41 During the years 1965 and 1966 thirty per cent of the drivers hired were Negroes, while in 1967, eight per cent of Omaha's 190 bus drivers are Negroes.42

40 Interview with Denny Holland, October 27, 1966.
41 Records of the Omaha Transit Company.
42 Ibid.
The Reed Campaign

After its successful campaigns against employment discrimination by the bottling and public transportation companies, the De Porres Club on January 12, 1953, opened a campaign against the Reed Ice Cream Company, a local producer and distributor with a plant, central store and branch outlets in Omaha. Reed's refusal to employ Negroes was especially galling since its plant and main store at 3106 North 24th Street was in the ghetto, where Negroes were its best customers.

As it had in prior campaigns, the Club voted to send a letter to Reed's informing the company that it was instituting a boycott because of the willful refusal to employ Negroes. The letter stated:

In April of 1951 after a series of telephone conversations, a committee of the De Porres Club met with Mr. Becker, who we were told was Reed's personnel manager. Mr. Becker told us he would not consider hiring Negroes at that time, but that later in the year (1951) he might give it some consideration. We are still waiting for an indication of a change in this unfair policy. This unfair policy of denying equal job opportunities to Negroes, especially because of your large number of Negro customers, has

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43 Minutes, January 12, 1953.
44 Ibid.
far too long stood in complete violation of the American ideal of equal opportunity. Beginning Monday, January 19th, unless we hear from you before then, we will stop supporting your unfair policy by not buying Reed's ice cream. We shall ask all our friends who believe in equal opportunity, regardless of color, to do the same until you open employment at all levels to qualified Negroes. We remain anxious to discuss a change of policy with you.  

De Porres members also sent letters to ghetto churches and to civic and social organizations explaining the campaign and seeking their support. During the following weeks, the distribution of handbills, begun early in the campaign, was extended. Furthermore, the Club contacted a number of ministers and informed them about the Reed campaign. Within a short period of time, most of the ministers on the near northside had spoken to their congregations about the campaign.  

A few weeks after the campaign began, the organizations contacted by the De Porres Club began their active support of it. A heartening development was the

45 Letter to the Management of Reed's from Denny Holland, president of the De Porres Club, Jan. 12, 1953.
46 Minutes, January 26, 1953.
47 Ibid., February 16, 1953. (For a copy of the handbill—see Appendix V, p. 99.)
48 Ibid., March 16, 1953.
formal endorsement of the campaign by the executive board of the Omaha NAACP chapter, accompanied by a request for a supply of handbills to be distributed by NAACP members.\textsuperscript{49} The \textit{Omaha Star} supported the boycott by publishing news and human interest accounts of the boycott.\textsuperscript{50}

A new phase of the campaign opened July 6th when De Porres Club members began picketing the Reed plant and main store. Two members carried signs, while others passed out handbills. The signs stated, "Your Cooperation Can Help End Racial Discrimination."\textsuperscript{51} After the first night of picketing, a Club spokesman said members were happy with the results and planned to

\textsuperscript{49}\textit{Ibid.}, March 2, 1953.

\textsuperscript{50}\textit{The Omaha Star}, May 8, 1953, p. 1. One account, entitled "Reed's and Race Pride," told of a lady who wanted Reed's ice cream but did not want to be seen buying it. She offered a lad about eight a quarter to buy it for her. He in turn said to her: "Don't you know they don't hire our people at Reed's? I wouldn't go in there for no money." As he turned on his heel to walk away, he gave a long look of burning disgust. She stood there a second and then headed straight home. She was ashamed but happy with a new found race pride. Something passed through her mind which she had not thought of for years, "and a child shall lead them." \textit{Ibid.}

follow it up until Negroes were employed at Reed's.  

Unlike its previous campaigns, this De Porres Club effort won additional outside support when the Reverend Felix C. Williams, pastor of the Zion Baptist Church, joined the pickets, carrying a sign which said that Negroes fought and died in Korea but were denied jobs at Reed's because of skin color. Commenting on his participation, Mr. Williams said: "I believe that it is my duty to help break down racial segregation and discrimination. It is not the job of one group. It is a job for everyone."

Picketing continued nightly into the fall. At the same time, letters came from all over the city with pledges of active assistance in the campaign.

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52 Ibid. It was reported that few Negroes even started to enter and those who did turned back when they saw the pickets. Many whites took handbills and also left without entering. A certain white person on receiving a handbill reportedly said: "My boy's life was saved by a Negro in Korea. As a small token of thanks to him, I will tell my friends not to buy Reed's ice cream." Ibid.

53 Ibid., September 4, 1953, p. 1. On Reverend Williams' decision to join the picketing, De Porres Club President Denny Holland said: "We are thrilled to find a local minister interested enough in his congregation to picket for them. Reverend Williams' action has inspired us all. He has struck a blow for truth." Ibid.

54 Ibid., October 23, 1953, p. 1.
Finally, on Sunday, January 24, 1954, after a year of heavy losses, Reed's Ice Cream Company finally put a Negro saleslady to work at its main store.\(^55\) It was almost a year to the day that the De Porres Club had begun its campaign against Reed's.\(^56\) With victory achieved, the chairman of the picketing committee, George Barton, commented: "We are happy that Reed's [sic] corrected the situation. The De Porres Club extends its most sincere congratulations to the many people, white and Negro, who refused to let their money support racial discrimination."\(^57\) Their goal achieved, the Club voted to end the boycott. Furthermore, they resolved: "If the inter-racial employment pattern should change, the matter will be considered again for action."\(^58\) A point of honor was thus settled for the De Porres Club, which now was

\(^{55}\text{Ibid., Jan. 29, 1954, p. 1. The lady, Mrs. Virginia Dixon, was to work at a regular 5:00 p.m. to 12:00 p.m. shift.}\)

\(^{56}\text{Ibid., The Club had planned at their meeting of January 16th to begin picketing again as soon as the weather permitted. \textit{Omaha Star}, January 22, 1954.}\)

\(^{57}\text{Ibid.}\)

\(^{58}\text{Ibid. In December, 1957, the Reed Ice Cream Company sold their plant to the Omaha Food Company and a year later sold all their stores to various businesses.}\)
beginning to experience a decrease in activity.

Indeed, the general program of the Club's activities tapered off following the Reed campaign. The Club still held its social functions; meetings continued to be held but less often. According to one time Club Secretary Merica Whitehall, the dwindling membership did little more than discuss problems during these years.59

A number of circumstances contributed to the decline of the Club. Many of its student members left Omaha after graduation. Many male members entered military service, and many of the women married.60

But as George Barton (who headed the Reed pickets) observed, many members also felt they had achieved meaningful gains and they wanted to sit back to see what would result. "We kept an eye on things," he said, "but no one else came along and put forth any effort in this area."61 Similarly, Denny Holland and Wilbur Phillips contend that no other group of young people took up where the De Porres Club left off.62

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59 Interview with Merica Whitehall, November 29, 1966.
60 Interview with Denny Holland, November 27, 1966.
61 Interview with George Barton, December 1, 1966.
Even the prospect of a new campaign directed against the hiring and placement policies of the Omaha Board of Education did not restore the vitality of the De Porres Club. To be sure, it brought a number of the old De Porres members back together. Former Club member Wilbur Phillips called the meetings and was subsequently elected president. Remarking upon the state of the Club at this time, Merica Whitehall recalled: "The handful that met with Wilbur Phillips was a far cry from the three hundred in the Club when Denny Holland was president." 63

The final fair employment campaign of the De Porres Club—in fact, its last major activity as an organization—must be put into the perspective of the time. The Club's decline had begun in 1954, when other voices were being raised and other forces launched in a growing nationwide civil rights movement.

The year 1954, of course, brought the epochal Brown v. Board of Education decision by the Supreme Court of the United States—a ruling which ended any legal basis for racial discrimination in public schools. This was the era of the revolutionary success of the Montgomery 63

63 Interview with Merica Whitehall, November 29, 1966.
bus boycott, of the emergence of Martin Luther King, the American Negro's greatest national leader since Booker T. Washington. By the end of the decade, it was clear that the Southern Negro—downtrodden and oppressed—was out to win his constitutional rights. Weary of promises and of the painfully slow grind toward equality through the courts, he realized that a better world could be won only by taking direct action. Mediation and discussion were dropped as lost causes. They were substituted by personal commitment, a willingness to take to the streets and put one's life on the line in order to get results.

While the Negro civil rights movement was gaining momentum in the South, a smaller and less vigorous De Porres Club decided to meet the problem of discriminatory hiring and teacher placement by the Omaha Board of Education. The campaign opened at the beginning of summer, 1959.

The School Board Campaign

The Negro public school teacher in Omaha was discriminated against in the following ways: no Negroes were employed in the high schools; Negro teachers in the grade schools were concentrated in the near northside,
and only one Negro clerk was employed by the school system. Wilbur L. Phillips, a former De Porres Club member just back to Omaha from Drake University with a law degree and newly admitted to the Nebraska bar, led the campaign against the Board of Education. "We are not trying to tell school officials who to hire," said Phillips. "We just ask that they do it fairly." He placed these simple facts before the public and the Board of Education:

There are only thirty-six Negro teachers in the Omaha public school system, all of them in the five elementary schools which serve the Near North Side. There are no Negro teachers in the high schools.  

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64 Evening World-Herald (Omaha), October 29, 1959, p. 7.

65 North Omaha Sun, July 1, 1959, p. 12.

66 Ibid. A study made in 1952 under Urban League supervision relating to employment attainments of Negro college graduates revealed the following: The Negro teachers who were teaching in Omaha at the time of the study stated that they were restricted to four elementary schools. The schools listed were Long, Kellom, Howard Kennedy, and Lake. Several of the teachers who were qualified to teach in secondary schools had been retained at the elementary level. Source: Jennings D. Baker, "Employment Attainments of Negroes Graduated by the University of Nebraska and the University of Omaha, 1945-1952 Inclusive" (unpublished Master's dissertation, Graduate School of Social Work, University of Nebraska, 1953), p. 38.
The De Porres Club reacted to this situation by sending a resolution to the Omaha School Board urging it to end its segregation of Negro teachers and discrimination against Negro applicants:

We the members of the Omaha De Porres Club hereby resolve as follows: That Whereas the Board of Education for the District of Omaha, Nebraska practices a policy of segregation and discrimination in choosing and placing teachers; and Whereas the School Board consistently hires white applicants without college degrees in preference to non-white applicants with college degrees; and Whereas this policy has the effect of depriving the school district of available teaching personnel regardless of the need; now Therefore, we hereby resolve that beginning on the 4th day of July, 1959, we shall exercise our prerogative as citizens, parents, and taxpayers to take appropriate action to remedy this damnable condition. 67

True to its tradition, the De Porres Club backed its communication with direct action. Pickets began their march around the grounds of the ancient, pretentious Joslyn "Castle"—a former residence given the Board of Education for use as its headquarters—on Monday evening, July 6. As they picketed at 40th and Davenport Streets, Club members also passed out protesting handbills to passing motorists. 68 Of this action, Phillips said:

67 The Omaha Star, June 5, 1959, p. 1.
68 Ibid., July 10, 1959, p. 1. (For a copy of the handbill—see Appendix VI, p. 100.)
Actually we have made our point, and that is to call public attention to what we have to say. We said we would picket and we felt we should do it. Des Moines and Minneapolis have Negro teachers in their high schools, and they were hired by the boards without any publicity at all.  

The campaign continued into the fall, when De Porres members circulated a petition addressed to members of the Board of Education. The petition said: "We, the undersigned, demand an end to racial discrimination in the Omaha Public School System!" The impact which this move had upon the general public is illustrated by Wilbur Phillips' comment: "The response has overwhelmed us. We have had countless invitations to churches. Several clubs have invited us to send a speaker or petitions to be signed."  

The Reverend Emmett T. Streeter of Clair Methodist Church led ghetto clerical support for the campaign by announcing the action to his congregation and being the first of hundreds at his church to sign the petition. At Mt. Nebo Baptist Church, the petition was also circulated at the invitation of Reverend John H. Whittington,  

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69 Benson Sun, July 9, 1959, p. 14.  
70 The Omaha Star, September 11, 1959, p. 1.  
71 Ibid.
pastor, and at Mt. Moriah Baptist Church on the invitation of Reverend David St. Clair. At both of these churches, the people lined up to wait their turn to sign the petitions.  

The next move was to extend picketing to several public high schools. Pickets walked to Central High School on the mornings of September 10th and 11th calling attention to the school board's practices. Members picketed at Technical High School on September 15th, at South High School on September 22nd, and at North High on October 13th.  

Furthermore, De Porres members picketed the opening session of the District 2 convention of the Nebraska

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72 Ibid. Clair Methodist Church is located at 2443 Evans Street. Mt. Nebo Baptist is located at 3211 Pinkney Street, and Mt. Moriah Baptist Church is located at 2602 North 24th Street.

73 Ibid., September 19, 1959, p. 1. Club members who participated told of the encouragement received from scores of students who assured them that they were in complete accord with their objectives. Ibid.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid., September 25, 1959, p. 1.

76 Ibid., October 16, 1959, p. 1. At North High the pickets were cursed by some of the boys. These students also threw clods of dirt at the pickets. By contrast, one woman, mother of a student at the school, saw the pickets and later called the De Porres Club and offered to bring some of the other parents who wanted to serve coffee and donuts to the pickets. Ibid.
State Educational Association held at the Omaha Civic Auditorium. They carried placards and handed out leaflets which called attention to three facts about their school system; those facts being: that no Negroes were employed in the high schools; that Negro teachers in grade schools were concentrated in the near northside; and, that the schools employed only one Negro clerk.  

At the end of the year 1959, the De Porres members elected to contact the leading officials in the state government, asking them to use the power of their office to end racial discrimination in the Omaha Public School System. Furthermore, George Barton related that hundreds of signatures had been obtained on a petition asking for an end to the racial practices within the school system.  

Early in 1960, a De Porres Club delegation headed by Club Secretary Merica Smith presented the petitions for redress of the Omaha School Board's hiring discrimination to Governor Ralph Brooks, and distribution of

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77 *Evening World-Herald* (Omaha), October 29, 1959, p. 7.
78 *The Omaha Star*, December 11, 1959, p. 1.
new handbills began in February, 1960. The handbills were mailed to sixty prominent persons, including all present members of the school board. This handbill illustrated by map the racial segregation and discrimination against Negro teachers in Omaha. It also pointed out that most midwest cities had Negroes teaching in their public high schools.  

The De Porres Club, in its Board of Education campaign, aroused wide public concern. Phillips contends that the campaign made Omahans generally aware of conditions about which they either didn't know or were apparently unconcerned.  

Unfortunately for the effectiveness and continuation of the De Porres Club, the outcome of its final campaign was ambivalent at best. It was not until the school superintendent Harry Burke died in 1962 and was succeeded by Paul Miller, a more progressively oriented superintendent, working with a new Board of Education, that the status of Negro teachers changed in Omaha.

In recent years, there have been definite signs which

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80 Ibid., February 19, 1960, p. 1. (For a copy of the handbill—see Appendix VII, p. 101.)

81 Interview with Wilbur Phillips, December 6, 1966.
are truly cause for hope as to the future of the Negro teacher in Omaha. The following statistics show this to be the case. During the 1956-57 school year, Omaha had 1,350 public school teachers, thirty-seven of these being Negroes confined to teaching in five elementary schools located in an area of the city inhabited predominantly by Negroes. Negroes did not teach in the high schools. 82

By the 1963-64 school year, three Negroes were teaching in two high schools. This number of teachers

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82 Milton D. Lewis, Employment and Utilization of Negro Teachers in Selected Communities, A Report Prepared by the Director of Industrial Relations of the Omaha Urban League (Omaha: Omaha Urban League, 1958), p. 3. Ibid.

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increased to nine teaching in five high schools the following year and to eleven in six high schools during the 1966-67 school year. Negro teachers, who previously were limited to teaching in a small number of schools within the Negro district, were, during the 1966-67 school year, assigned to a total of twenty-four schools, eight of these being outside of the Negro district. Twelve Negroes served as clerks and seven in administrative offices through the 1966-67 school year. The number of Negroes teaching in the Omaha Public Schools rose from sixty-nine in 1962 to 140 in 1966, an increase of more than 100 per cent. 83

As its history drew to a close, the De Porres Club thus counted four major campaigns in a crucial field of human rights—equal employment opportunity. Two of these campaigns were successful. Direct results came quickly. Holland agrees that the Reed and Coca-Cola campaigns were clear-cut victories. 84

But the campaigns against the Street Railway Company and the Board of Education, more drawn-out efforts,

83Office of the Director of the Department of Social Services, Omaha Board of Education.

84Interview with Denny Holland, July 14, 1966.
met little immediate success that could be directly attributed to the efforts of the Club. The officials of these establishments were far more removed from the forces of compulsion and less liable to economic coercion than were those of Reed's and the local Coca-Cola plant. The fact that the qualifications for driving a bus and particularly for teaching school are greater than would be those for working in an ice cream store or bottling plant must also be considered when measuring the success of the various campaigns. That the School Board does the bulk of its hiring but once a year is also a factor to be regarded when comparing the swiftness of any response to pressure with that of a business which might hire at any given time.

The efforts of the De Porres Club to secure employment for qualified Negroes consequently proved most successful when centered on semi-skilled occupations in consumer-oriented industries. It is these similar type industries, where the largest reservoir of unemployed and underemployed is available, which are most amenable to CORE-type pressure. 85

Though the De Porres Club also worked to end discrimination in housing, and in recreation and eating facilities, in retrospect its main thrust came with efforts to open up employment opportunities. Perhaps of greatest historical significance is the fact that De Porres members in these campaigns employed techniques which were to become part of the mid-century American street scene. The De Porres Club had demonstrated that these weapons made up an effective arsenal for peaceful revolution. This lesson was not soon to be forgotten.
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

On Saturday, April 3, 1965, a Testimonial Dinner was given at the Creighton University Student Center honoring the Reverend John P. Markoe, S.J., for his apostolate among the Negroes in Omaha. The featured speaker on this occasion was John Howard Griffin, author of the provocative best-seller *Black Like Me*. Eloquent tributes to Father Markoe flowed in at this time from such men as Roy Wilkins, Executive Secretary of the NAACP, Frank B. Morrison, Governor of the State of Nebraska, Whitney Young, Executive Director of the National Urban League, and Bishop Vincent F. Waters of Raleigh, North Carolina. In his speech at the Omaha dinner, Griffin, speaking of Father Markoe, said:

> It has been the few—and I say that word sadly—it has been the few who have acted who have been what we all profess to be, who have salvaged us from unspeakable scandal; if indeed we have been salvaged from unspeakable scandal.¹

In a very real sense, these words can be applied to the Club which this priest inspired and led. It was

the few individuals making up the De Porres Club who acted in a positive direct manner to bring about greater social justice for the Negro in Omaha. However, this group was unable to get the enthusiastic support and encouragement of the general populace of Omaha in order to continue its mission. Their call was not heard nor their message heeded. Nor did any group with a similar program come along to supplant the De Porres Club. The De Porres Club with its limited potential certainly did not achieve its aim of delivering those who made up Omaha's largest minority group from existing under adverse social conditions.

Omaha's Negroes, now numbering thousands more than in the days of the De Porres Club,² find themselves still segregated from the rest of society—segregated to a world of roach bites and sink baths. The Negro ghetto, characterized by filth and squalor, is in many respects merely an expansion of its former self.³ In many cases, the streets in this area are in need of resurfacing, the

²Urban League estimates the Negro population of Omaha at 35,000.

³The census tracts within the area show the highest density for any area in Omaha. There is an average of 4.8 persons per 2 bedroom unit compared with 2.6 for the city as a whole. Source: City Housing Office.
sidewalks in need of repair, and the lighting grossly inadequate. About forty-five per cent of the property in that specific geographic area does not meet the standard of minimum housing codes. His mobility frozen because of the lack of an open housing ordinance, the Omaha Negro is forced to pay about ten per cent more rent for comparable property in the white community regardless of the condition of the house in which he lives.

This same area shows the highest ratio of social diseases, crime rate, juvenile delinquency, and school dropouts. Although they constitute about ten per cent of the population, approximately twenty-five per cent of the total families receiving ADC are Negroes. A lack of education and of work experience characterizes these assistance recipients.

Due to De Porres Club efforts, Negroes now work for the Coca-Cola Bottling Company and the Omaha Transit Company. Employment opportunities, however, continue to

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4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Douglas County Assistance Bureau.
7 Ibid.
present a problem for Omaha's Negroes. At the crux of the employment difficulties is the problem of their getting on-the-job experience and training in skilled employment. Chronic unemployment, which is certainly no stranger to the Negroes in Omaha, continues to present a year-round critical problem for them. The unemployment rate among the non-white work force is approximately fifteen per cent. This compares with about 2.3 per cent for the city as a whole. Median family income for Negroes is about $3,700.00 as compared with $6,300.00 for the entire city.8

When the achievements of the visionaries who made up the De Porres Club are viewed in relation to the Negro situation as it exists in 1967, it must be said that the De Porres Club although it made some practical gains did not attain a lasting success. Since its membership was being constantly depleted and because no other sizeable organization formed to pursue the goal of social justice with such determination, the De Porres Club's ideal of equality for all Omahans regardless of color is far from being a reality.

8Urban League estimate.
The same fate which the De Porres Club as a fore-runner in the civil rights struggle encountered in the 1950's may very possibly prove to be the fate of civil rights movements of the 1960's. The changes in the social situation which are being encouraged are most certainly not being brought about with the speed which their urgency demands.

The De Porres Club functioned at a time when championing the rights of the Negro was not the most popular area in which to be engaged. Action groups of the sixties have indeed the great advantage of working in an era when the cause of civil rights is prominent.

But the fact remains that civil rights groups in the North today face basically the same society in which the De Porres Club functioned. Both societies had members who were outspoken in defense of others' rights and privileges so long as defending these rights did not involve a firm commitment on their part to act in a positive way, so long as defending these rights did not strike too close to home. Both societies overflowed with what Martin Luther King refers to as the greatest enemy of the Negro today, the well-meaning liberal. This is the type of person who loudly decries the many
injustices suffered by the Negro in the South but hurries to sell his house when a Negro family moves into his neighborhood.

The civil rights struggle already appears to be less popular in 1967 than earlier in the decade. Perhaps this change is indicative of the character of the average individual. It would seem that most men cannot long stand the strain of prolonged effort to live in accordance with very high ideals. When the social struggle within our society becomes voiced less and less from pulpít and press, a fresh new cause will take its place.

As this thesis is being written, there is much talk of renewed rioting on Omaha's near northside during the summer of 1967, rioting which may surpass that of the previous summer in ferocity and destructiveness. This most certainly is not the answer to the problems of Omaha's 35,000 Negro inhabitants but it is a voice crying to heaven for relief. A former De Porres Club member contends that this rioting is the best thing that has happened for the Negro in Omaha since the De Porres Club because it has had the effect of directing attention to the near northside. Let us hope that if attention is directed to this area, it is directed with the same spirit of Christian compassion that seemed to generate the De Porres Club.
Credo and Pledge
of
The Omaha De Porres Club

As MEMBERS of the OMAHA DE PORRES CLUB we firmly believe that:

ALL MEMBERS of the ONE HUMAN RACE, without any exception, whatsoever, have been equally endowed by the CREATOR, through HIS promulgation of the NATURAL LAW, with the following fundamental HUMAN RIGHTS:

A. THE RIGHT TO LIVE A FULL AND COMPLETE LIFE, to the utmost of their capacity, both in PRIVATE and in PUBLIC. Consequently, we recognize the following inalienable rights in each and every member of the HUMAN RACE:

1. The right to be recognized as a MEMBER of the HUMAN RACE.

2. The right to be treated with the respect and dignity DUE every member of the HUMAN RACE.

3. The right to be integrated into the SOLIDARITY of the HUMAN RACE.

4. The right to choose the BEST means to living the FULLEST and MOST COMPLETE LIFE POSSIBLE.
B. Consequently, since every individual human Right implies a corresponding OBLIGATION on the part of others to respect that right, always keeping in view the COMMON GOOD, we as MEMBERS of THE OMAHA DE PORRES CLUB, utterly condemn as UNJUST every violation of the above mentioned inalienable human rights. Specifically do we condemn as UNJUST:

1. The estimating of the some members of the HUMAN RACE as essentially inferior human beings.
2. Anything and everything that tends to FRUSTRATE in any way the living of the FULLEST AND MOST COMPLETE life POSSIBLE in another.
3. Every form of COMPULSORY SEGREGATION.
4. Any and all forms of DISCRIMINATION against individuals because of COLOR only.

C. We recognize the above not only as violations of JUSTICE, which requires that we render unto every HUMAN BEING his DUE, but also as violations of CHARITY, which further requires that we LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR AS OURSELVES.

D. CONSEQUENTLY, as MEMBERS OF THE OMAHA DE PORRES CLUB, we pledge ourselves to regulate our own dealings with others in accordance with the above TRUTHS and PRINCIPLES, and, further, we pledge ourselves to strive in every way possible to get others to do the same.
Shrine of Our Lady,
Saint Stanislaus Seminary,
Feast of the Assumption, 1917.

Oh! Jesus! We, the undersigned, resolve and determine, in honor of thy Sacred Heart, thy Holy Mother, our Guardian Angels, and all our Patron Saints, especially, Saint Ignatius and Saint Peter Claver, to give and dedicate our whole lives and all our energies, as far as we are able and it is not contrary to a pure spirit of perfect indifference and obedience, for the work of the salvation of the Negros in the United States, and though altogether unworthy, we trust in thy Sacred Hearts, Oh! Jesus and Mary, to obtain for us the priceless favor of doing so. And do thou Oh! Saint Peter Claver, pray for us—Amen.

Also, to daily repeat this resolution, for the fulfillment of our expectations and desires.

Signed:

1. Wm. M. Markoe S. J.
2. J. M. Markoe
3. ....
4. C. B. W.
Coca-Cola Discriminates

Omaha Coca-Cola Bottling Co. Has Refused to Hire Negroes Regardless of Their Abilities.

This Is A Complete Denial of the American Ideal of Freedom of Opportunity.

Refuse to Support Discrimination

DON'T BUY COKE

Distributed by Omaha DePorres Club
The O & CB Street Railway Company, a public service, has little regard for community welfare. They refuse to hire qualified Negro Drivers.

Don't Ride Omaha Buses and Streetcars. If You Must Ride, PROTEST

By Using 18 Pennies.

OMAHA DE PORRES CLUB
DONT SUPPORT
RACIAL
DISCRIMINATION

Help Some Negroes
Get Jobs at Reed's
Ice Cream Co.

Don't Buy
Reed's Ice Cream
Until They Do!

Distributed by the
OMAHA DEPORRIS CLUB.
Little Rock? NO
Omaha!

In The Omaha Public School System, No Negro Teachers In High Schools
Negro Teachers Segregated To Near North Side
Of 79 Clerks, Not One Is A Negro

CORRECT THIS
Let's make Omaha Real?
The V All American City

Distributed by THE OMAHA DE PORRES CLUB
LETS END SEGREGATION OF NEGRO TEACHERS

Omaha, Nebraska

Approximate location of schools having Negro teachers

Shaded areas show concentration of Negro population

Distributed by Omaha DePorres Club
Let's end discrimination against Negro teachers

- No Negro teachers in Public High Schools
- Negroes teaching in Public High Schools
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Since this study in part dealt with various facets of the interracial situation on a national scope, many general studies along with those dealing with more confined aspects of the problem proved essential both for discovering the general nature of the problem and the numerous aspects of it. Gunnar Myrdal's An American Dilemma is the best single over-all reference work for the period up to the end of World War II. This work is helpful for an understanding of the white man's theory of color caste, the rank order of discrimination, racial beliefs—North and South—and the growth and migration of the Negro population. Arnold Rose's The Negro In America although less valuable as a general study was useful as a general reference work. John Hope Franklin's From Slavery To Freedom traces important economic, political, social, and cultural trends. Rayford W. Logan's The Negro in the United States and Benjamin Quarles The Negro In The Making Of America are well-written general works.

In order better to understand the problems which the Negro faces in our Northern cities, it is helpful to view his migration and settlement in the North with its
effects both on the Northern white and the Negro. Among those works which present a clear picture of the migration and its over-all effects are Ira Corrine Brown's *The Story of the American Negro*, Jerome Dowd's *The Negro In American Life*, and Maurice R. Davie's *Negroes In American Society*. St. Clair Drake's and Horace R. Clayton's *Black Metropolis*, a history of the Negro in Chicago, renders a better understanding not only of the migration, settlement, and current status of the Negro in that city, but also the problems in general which the Negro has faced and still faces in the North.

Since his arrival in the North, the Negro has been faced with the nemesis of segregation and discrimination. The former among other things has confined him to the ghetto with little actual chance of escape, while the latter has deprived him most importantly of equal employment opportunity. Several excellent studies have been made on residential segregation in the North. An excellent work on the effects which the ghetto has in conditioning or creating a social type is Louis Wirth's *The Ghetto*. *Negroes In Cities* is a comprehensive study of residential segregation and neighborhood change. Forster and Epstein's *The Troublemakers* with its treatment of Omaha is an excellent source on the problems of
housing segregation and the attitudes of both whites and Negroes toward the problem. The economic position of the Negro along with interacting functions of education and environment are dealt with in detail in *Black Metropolis* and in Eli Ginzberg's factual work *The Negro Potential*.

One hundred years of second-class citizenship have had a great effect on the personality and mental outlook of the Negro in this country. Among those works shedding light on this particular aspect of the racial situation is Leonard Bloom's and Norval D. Glenn's *Transformation of the American Negro*. The book proved useful for an understanding of how the attitude of the Negro toward himself is changing and how this new outlook affects his ambitions and means he uses to achieve those ambitions. Thomas F. Pettigrew in a shorter study, *A Profile Of The American Negro*, takes a many-sided view of the Negro at mid-century; his personality, his mental and physical health, and his crime rate. Gordon Allport's *The Nature of Prejudice*, a very competent study, stresses the psychological aspects of prejudice. He demonstrates how prejudice becomes a part of one's life tissue although essentially unrelated to the personality as a whole.
The De Porres Club as a pioneer civil rights group took direct action against racial injustice in Omaha as did later civil rights groups in other Northern cities. Among those works which were useful for their analysis of the current civil rights movement and its beginnings are Martin Luther King's *Stride Toward Freedom* the tone of which points the way to significant social change and a new development of race relations in our times. King's later and more general work *Why We Can't Wait* spells out the reasons for Negro demonstrations, of the frustration which breeds impatience, and the Why of Freedom Now.

Louis Lomax's *The Negro Revolt* was useful for its discussion of the question of why the current movement began and for its informative discussions of the roles which the NAACP, Urban League, and such direct action groups as CORE and SNCC are playing in this social revolution. In much the same way, Samuel Lubell in *White and Black: Test Of A Nation* traces the changing patterns of the struggle for Negro independence through its leadership. An especially noteworthy work is James Baldwin's *Nobody Knows My Name* for its attempt to show up segregation in both the North and the South for what it is and for the diminishing effect which it is having on the nation.
A number of sources were essential for discovering both the history of the Negro in Omaha and for uncovering particular facts about life in this city's ghetto. The various Census reports on the growth and location of Omaha's Negro population from the early part of the century to the present were basic aids. T. Earl Sullenger's *Studies In Urban Sociology* and the Works Progress Administration book *The Negroes Of Nebraska* were more general helps in this area for their information on Negro migration, settlement, and the general social and economic problems which confronted the Negro in Omaha.

Fact sheets about the Negro in Omaha compiled by the Omaha Urban League were particularly valuable sources for statistics relating to Negro population, employment, education, housing, health and social welfare problems. Besides the Urban League, statistics from the City Housing Office and the Douglas County Assistance Bureau constituted good sources for up-to-date information on the Negro in Omaha.

Primary sources on the De Porres Club are quite plentiful. The Club minutes constitute by far the largest source of information about the Club. A fairly complete running commentary on the Club's activities from November,
1947 until 1953, the minutes reflect the true spirit of the lively, enthusiastic membership and reveal the naivity of this association out to reach the millenium in a most difficult field of endeavor. Father John P. Markoe's informative and detailed article on the De Porres Club in the Interracial Review for February, 1950 is also a good source of information on the Club's beginning and early activities. Besides these, certain Club correspondence, particularly with local firms practicing discrimination in hiring, was of use.

The largest additional source of information on the Club's activities are the many front page clippings found in the city's Negro press, The Omaha Star. By printing the minutes of its weekly meetings and celebrating its victories both major and minor in bold type, Miss Mildred Brown, owner and publisher of The Star since 1938, supported the De Porres Club by keeping the near northside abreast of its activities. The Star proved particularly valuable by filling the gaps left by the minutes as they became less consistent in 1953 and as a substitute for the minutes in covering the period of the Club's renewed activity.

The press, particularly Omaha's local daily, was
of limited use. Unlike the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* which strongly supported Father Markoe in that city, the *Omaha World-Herald* remained conspicuously silent on the De Porres Club's activities.

Finally, the personal interview was used to attain more additional information on specific incidents and activities not reported in the minutes. Interviews with Father Markoe and Denny Holland were most informative and to a lesser degree those with former Club members Wilbur Phillips, George Barton, and Merica Whitehall. The author is also grateful to Mr. Mac Gothard of the Omaha Coca-Cola Company for his frank opinions and to Father John Killoren, S.J., for familiarizing him with the history of Saint Benedict's mission and parish.

Although personal interviews did help fill certain gaps left by the minutes, they were not crucial to the writing of this paper. The time lapse has dulled many memories and inevitably led to conflicting stories on various incidents.
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Public Documents


Revised Statutes of Nebraska, 1943. Reissue of Volume IA 1962, Published by the Revisor of Statutes, 1962. This volume contains the full text of Nebraska's Civil Rights Statute which was adopted in 1893.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920. Population, Vol. III. This volume was useful for its information on Nebraska's and Omaha's Negro population during the important decade of migration from the South.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940. Population, Vol. II. The statistics from this volume point out the relatively small increase in Omaha's Negro population between the two World Wars.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. Seventeenth Census of the United States: 1950. Population, Vol. II. The census of 1950 was significant for it pointed out on the large growth of Omaha's Negro population between 1940 and 1950, a period of large migration to Omaha and the North in general.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. Seventeenth Census of the United States: 1950. Population Census Report, Census Tract Statistics Omaha, Nebraska, Vol. III. This source was useful for it pointed out just where the Negro population was concentrated in the City of Omaha after the war, a time when the De Porres Club was beginning its activities.

Useful information on the Omaha Negro's health and mortality rates was found in this volume.

**Books**


This book stresses the psychological aspects of prejudice. It demonstrates how prejudice becomes part of one's life tissue although essentially unrelated to the personality as a whole.


Especially noteworthy is the author's attempt to show up segregation in both the North and the South for what it is and for the diminishing effect which it is having upon the nation.


An aid in understanding how the attitude of the Negro toward himself is changing and how this new outlook affects his ambitions and means he uses to achieve those ambitions.


This volume was useful for its numerous essays on the subject of segregation and discrimination in our cities.


Helpful for its clear picture of the migration of the Negro and the effects that it had nationwide.


As a source book on migration and race relations after World War I, this work proved very helpful.

A very excellent, readable book. By reading this study of the history of the Negro in Chicago, one may better understand the problems in general which the Negro has faced and still faces in the North.


This is an excellent study on the problems of housing segregation and the attitudes of both whites and Negroes toward the problem.


A well-written work on the history of the Negro in America. Important economic, political, social, and cultural trends are traced.


A factual report on the economic position of the Negro is the major concern of this book. However, the interacting functions of education, environment, and segregation are also discussed.


The tone of the book points the way to significant social change and a new development of race relations in our times.


King spells out the reasons for Negro demonstrations of the frustration that breeds impatience, and the Why of Freedom Now.


A full-scale study of the four decades from 1877-1918 which produced the "color line" and the "separate but equal" philosophy. A very well-written and informative book.
Contains a good account of the history of the Negro from slavery to the present day and an informative list of documents concerned with steps taken to improve the Negro's lot from the Emancipation Proclamation to the decision in Brown v. Board of Education.

An aid for its discussion of the question of why the current movement began and its informative discussions of the NAACP, sit-ins, freedoms rides, and Black Muslims.

Ranging widely, Lubell traces the changing patterns of the struggle for Negro independence through its leadership and its place in American politics.

The best single over-all reference work for the period up to the end of World War II. This work proves most helpful for an understanding of the white man's theory of color caste, the rank order of discriminations, racial beliefs—North and South—and the growth and migration of the Negro population.

An excellent source for background material on the Negro in Omaha. The source was of limited use, however, for its data did not pertain specifically to the Omaha of the De Porres Club.

The author takes a many-sided view of the Negro at mid-century; his personality, his mental and physical health, and his crime rate.

Quarles views the three and a half centuries of the Negro's existence in this country in light of his struggle for civil and social rights.


This work proved helpful not only from an historical point of view but more particularly with regard to the white man's theory of the color caste.


An excellent source in general on the migration of the Negro to the North.


Stegner's book was useful as a source on life in the Northern ghettos.

Sullenger, T. Earl. *Studies In Urban Sociology.* Omaha: University of Omaha, 1933.

Although it does not delve deeply into the race problem, the book proved useful as a source on Negro settlement in Omaha and the many social and economic problems which have confronted the Negro in this city.


A very excellent and comprehensive study of residential segregation and neighborhood change in the United States.


Autobiography of a light-skinned Negro who passed for white and worked for the cause of Negro rights. The results of his investigations into lynchings and race riots for the NAACP are most interesting and revealing.
As a study of the organization of voluntary associations in this country, this work was useful.

Helpful for grasping the phenomenon of the ghetto and the effects which the ghetto has in the conditioning and creating of a social type.

A good brief cataloguing of the origins of segregation. Stress is laid on the comparative freedom in many aspects which the Negroes in the South enjoyed from Reconstruction to the time when "Jim Crow" legislation took many of these freedoms from him.

Periodicals

Rev. Dunne's treatment of the neighborhood integration problem convinces the reader that this is a white problem.

King reaches the regrettable conclusion that it is not so much the white supremacist who blocks the Negro's path to freedom but the white moderate who is more dedicated to order than to justice.

Father Markoe's commentary on the beginning and early activities of the De Porres Club was most informative and proved very useful for the writing of this thesis.

Rich gives a brief history of CORE from its early years in Chicago to its arrival on the national scene following the sit-ins in 1961.


The author emphasizes forms of direct action used in the Negro protest such as boycotts, sit-ins, kneel-ins, and freedom rides.


Waskow examines the nonviolent action techniques developed in the civil rights movement.

Newspapers


This edition of the Sun proved helpful for its report on the progress of the De Porres Club School Board campaign soon after it began.

Dundee and West Omaha Sun. April 1, 1965.

A useful edition for its interesting article on Father Markoe's experiences in fighting racial bigotry. It was written on the occasion of the testimonial dinner honoring Father Markoe in April, 1965.


Unlike the St. Louis Post-Dispatch which supported Father Markoe in his fights for racial equality in that city, the Omaha World-Herald gave him no such help. Although it did acclaim the production of Trial by Fire and mentioned Walter White's speech in the above editions, it lent no aid to the De Porres Club when direct action for civil rights was involved.
This edition was interesting for its fine article on Fathers John and William Markoe on the occasion of Father John Markoe's testimonial dinner in April, 1965.

This edition reported on the current status of the Negro teacher in Omaha and what the De Porres Club intended to do in order to improve that situation.

Omaha Guide. April 8, 1950.
A very informative and detailed article on the De Porres Club's production of Trial by Fire appeared in this edition of the Guide.

By far the largest source of information on the activities of the De Porres Club other than the minutes appeared in the many front page articles of this weekly Negro newspaper. These articles not only helped to fill gaps in the minutes particularly when they become less consistent in 1953 and for the most part serve as a substitute for them when the Club was reorganized.

Reports

Facts on a Fair Employment Practices Law for Nebraska.
This brief but informative report tells what a number of civic groups, including the De Porres Club, wanted in the way of a Fair Employment Practices law for the state.

A most revealing report on the plight of the aspiring minority teacher in Omaha.

This report proved useful for its information on population, employment, housing, and the health and social welfare problems of the Omaha Negro.


Although it contains much of the same information as the December, 1952 Urban League report, this report lent more information on the employment problems and low incomes among Negroes.


Although this report contained much information on the economic plight of the Negro in general, it was most useful for its information on the housing situation in the ghetto.

Unpublished Material

Baker, Jennings D. "Employment Attainments of Negroes Graduated by the University of Nebraska and the University of Omaha, 1945-1952 Inclusive." Unpublished Master's dissertation, Graduate School of Social Work, University of Nebraska, 1953.

Contained useful information on the position of the Negro public school teacher in Omaha.


The minutes of the weekly Club meetings proved to be the most important and essential source for this study. A running commentary on the Club's activities during these years, the minutes reflect the eagerness of this youthful group out to change the ingrained attitudes of a city and also the membership's naivete with regard to effecting such changes.
Omaha Transit Company. Records.  
These records were useful for their information on the current number of Negroes employed by the company.

Saint Benedict's Parish. Records.  
A useful source for the history of Saint Benedict's as both parish and mission.

Other Sources

City Housing Office.  
This source was useful for information on the housing problems of Negroes in the City of Omaha.

Director of the Department of Social Services, Omaha Board of Education.  
This office provided helpful information on the employment and placement of Negro teachers in Omaha's Public Schools from 1962-1967.

Douglas County Assistance Bureau.  
This bureau provided up-to-date statistics on Negro health and welfare problems in the City of Omaha.

Interview with Mac Gothard, Manager, Omaha Coca-Cola plant. November 2, 1966.  
Gothard gave useful information not only concerning the De Porres Club's Coca-Cola campaign but also on the general impact of the Club in the days when championing the cause of civil rights was not the most popular thing to do.

Interviews with Denny Holland helped to fill gaps in the minutes and provided much useful additional information on Club activities.

Father Killoren provided useful information on Saint Benedict's both as parish and mission.

Father Markoe provided the writer not only with many facts not found in the Club minutes but also with many interesting highlights.

Interview with William R. Milner, former Omaha City Commissioner. October 24, 1966.

Provided rather negative information concerning the reasons for attaching sub-section 36, non-discrimination clause, to the new franchise of the Street Railway Company.


Phillips provided helpful information concerning the final campaign of the De Porres Club against the hiring and placement policies of Omaha Board of Education.

Interview with Walter X. Spellman, former Omaha City Commissioner, October 24, 1966.

Like the interview with former commissioner Milner, the one with Spellman proved of little use.

Interview with Warren R. Swigart, former Omaha City Commissioner. October 24, 1966.

Swigart was able to recall that certain "Negro groups" were pressuring for a change in the hiring policies of the Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway Company.

Interview with Merica Whitehall, past Secretary, Omaha De Porres Club. November 29, 1966.

This former officer of the Club provided helpful information on the history of the De Porres Club between its two actions phases and helped to account for the period of calm following the Reed's campaign.

Letter from Denny Holland, President of the De Porres Club, to Mac Gothard, Manager of the Omaha Coca-Cola plant. May 1, 1951.

The De Porres Club's ultimatum to the Omaha Coca-Cola Company.
Letter from Denny Holland, President of the De Porres Club, to the Management of the Reed Ice Cream Company. January 12, 1953.
Letter informing the Reed Company of the impending De Porres Club boycott.

Restaurant Survey taken by the Young Christian Workers. April, 1958.
This survey reveals the extent to which discriminatory attitudes existed among the owners of eating places in the City of Omaha.
OMAHA, NEBRASKA

SHADED AREAS SHOW NEGRO AND INDIAN RESIDENCY
X CENTER OF DOWNTOWN BUSINESS DISTRICT
BOUNDARY LINES AS OF 1950 - ANNEXED AREAS NOT SHOWN