

VF Detroit - Politics & Government

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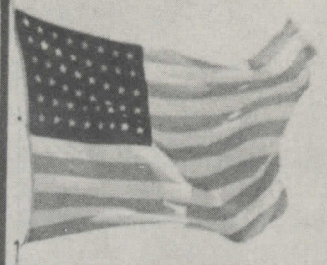
"The Fifth Anniversary of an Idea"

**CITY OF
DETROIT**

MAYOR'S INTERRACIAL COMMITTEE

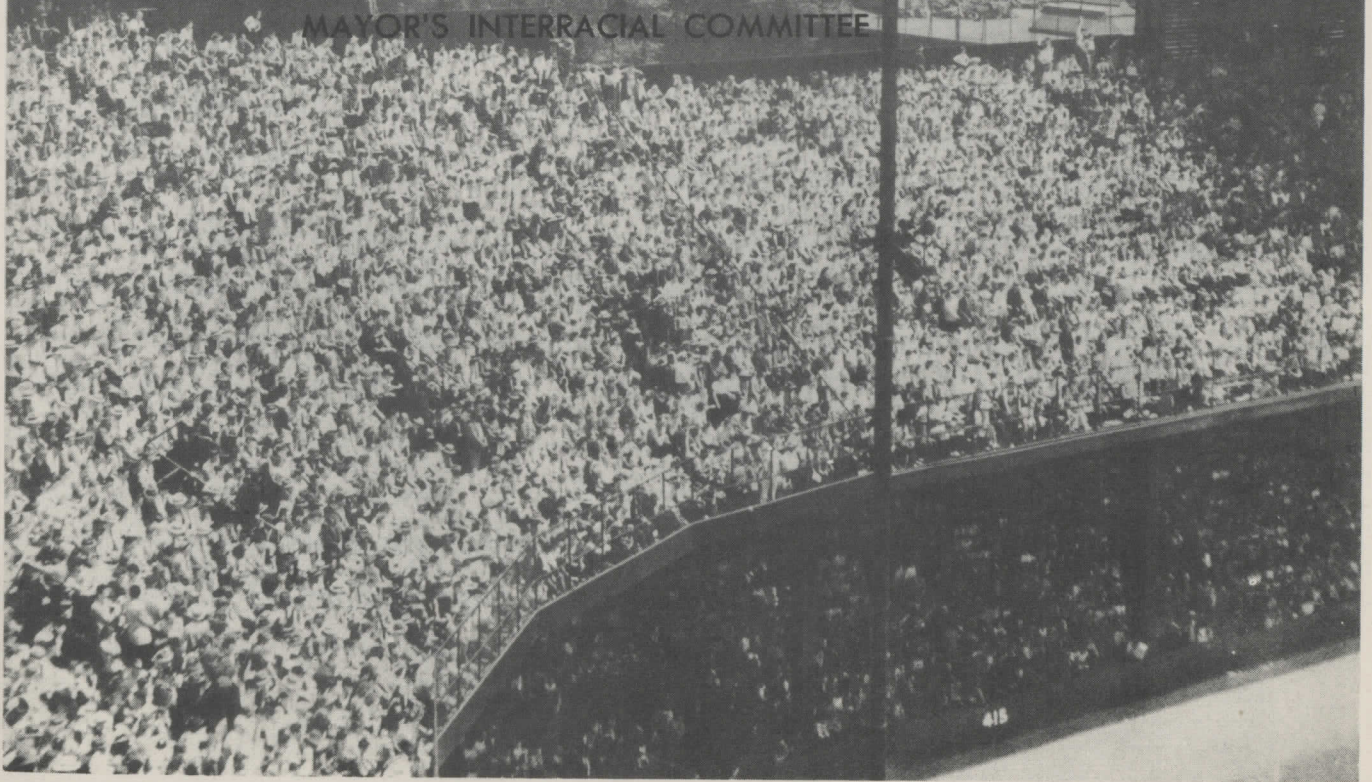
[1948]

FIFTH ANNUAL REPORT 1948



LOCK SHADOW
EM
RAZORS
AND
BLADES

CITY OF DETROIT
MAYOR'S INTERRACIAL COMMITTEE



CITY OF DETROIT, MICHIGAN

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CITY OF DETROIT
MAYOR'S INTERRACIAL COMMITTEE

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PREFACE: *The Fifth Anniversary of an Idea*

"The Fifth Anniversary of an Idea" represents five years of our existence and operation as a city agency. This is the Fifth Annual Report of the Mayor's Interracial Committee to the Mayor, Common Council and People of the City of Detroit. The idea we speak of is 172 years old; as old as Thomas Jefferson, as old as the Declaration of Independence which points out so clearly that "to secure . . . the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness . . . governments are instituted among men." Our operations are based on the extension of this idea: that local government has become and must continue to be a positive force in protecting and guaranteeing the right of ALL citizens in Detroit to exercise their American heritage.

For five years now, with the aid and assistance of other public and private groups, the Mayor's Interracial Committee has been working to close the gap between the belief in the democratic ideals which make our country great and the practices of prejudice and discrimination which so contradict those ideals and drain the strength and vitality from us as a people, a city and a nation of many races, many nationalities and many religions.

This Annual Report is a composite picture of five years of operation of the Mayor's Interracial Committee projected against a background of the significant events, trends and actions in our City, State and Nation. Economic conditions in the country at large and the opportunities for employment have influenced the course of interracial relations in Detroit. Laws passed by the national Congress, an executive order by the President, or a decision by the United States Supreme Court, all have had an impact on the local

scene and have altered the way that people act toward other people in our city. We seek in this Annual Report to chart the meaning of these changes and the ways in which our activities have changed to meet the new conditions and the needs of all the people in Detroit.

There have been at least four major program emphases in the work of the Mayor's Interracial Committee, and each of the four phases of the Committee's operations has developed naturally out of a real community need. There are no sharp lines of demarcation or dates which say "this was the beginning . . . this was the end" of any particular activity. Rather, each phase as it was introduced as a part of the activities and services of the Committee has developed alongside and as an integral part of our program to serve the needs of the entire community.

The *first phase*, beginning as it did after the race riot of 1943, emphasized what might be called a holding operation against community-wide tension and conflict. The *second phase* broadened the scope of the Committee's activities to include the development of an educational program for better understanding. The *third phase* brought increasing responsibility to the Committee as it took the lead in formulating and enunciating the democratic goals toward which people might work as they sought to change the discriminatory conditions in private and public life. And finally, the *fourth phase* has centered around the development of a community action program to bridge the gaps between the democratic ideals and present practices. Each phase is, today, an integral part of our total program.

TENSION AND CONFLICT: *The Threats to Law & Order*



In January of 1944 when the Mayor's Interracial Committee was formed, its aims and purposes were clear cut, not only to those who were to serve on the Committee itself but also to the people of Detroit who were aware that their city had suffered one of the most disastrous race riots in the history of this country. The Committee, formed as the successor to the temporary Interracial Peace Committee of twelve persons appointed by the Mayor several days after the June riot of 1943, had the major task of bringing some measure of confidence and the semblance of order back into a city which was still very much at war with itself. People were still fearful. Rumor of renewed outbreaks of conflict circulated daily, and the sputtering fires of high tension and conflict as seen in terms of the reported incidents of name-calling and fighting still continued to burn.

With a modest budget and a small staff, the Mayor's Interracial Committee went to work to build confidence. Confronted by the magnitude of the problem but with the firm conviction that tension and conflict at all costs must be kept under control, every known tool, every resource that could be enlisted to this end was used to break the paralysis of fear and to make some headway against the more basic and immediate problems which kept the possibility of community-wide conflict ever present.

In its first months, the Committee operated as the consultant and stimulator of the changes out of which confi-

dence is built. Its first meetings were held in the offices of those City Departments in closest contact with the public and were devoted to a study of the relationship of the departments' services, policies and practices to racial attitudes and tensions in the community. As a result of the Committee's study, plans were made for the extension of the services of the D.S.R., Police, Parks and Recreation, and Welfare Departments in an attempt to help ease the situation. In-service training of city department employees was also recommended to change practices which were potential sources of friction.

The major problem, however, was controlling the situations of conflict and tension out of which further conflict might grow. Keeping law and order in a city was the responsibility of the Police Department, but the police needed more than force to be effective. They needed the confidence of people, the kind of confidence that comes when people know that the laws of the city and state are being enforced fairly and equally, without reference to race, color or creed. Since public attitudes toward the Police Department were so disturbed at the time and considered so vital to the maintenance of interracial peace in Detroit, the Interracial Committee set about to help remove the misunderstanding and criticism which stood between the Police Department and various groups in the community. To this end, knowledge about race relations was introduced by the Police Department as a regular part of its training program for police officers. Of particular significance, however, for the building of genuine understanding and goodwill was the setting up, in 1946, of the "Study Committee on Police-Community Relations," for the purpose of discussing and improving the relationship between the Negro citizenry and the Police Department.

From the beginning the Interracial Committee recognized that it was not a police agency, that its effectiveness lay in other areas. Police action is required when laws have been violated. One of the main contributions of the Interracial Committee in dealing with tension and conflict has been in the development of techniques for the handling of tension before and after the law violation stage has been reached.

The circulation of rumors in the community was the breeding ground of tension. To prevent tension the Committee sought to stop the rumors before they had a chance to develop. The Committee recognized the key factor of "community intelligence," the knowledge of rumors, complaints, incidents, areas of tension, general community con-

ditions and problems which affect the way people live in Detroit. During the first year of operation the chief sources of such working knowledge of what was happening in the community were the weekly Police and Detroit Street Railway incident reports and information from "volunteers" in the community who acted as the Committee's eyes and ears. Today, very close working relationships are maintained not only between the Mayor's Interracial Committee staff and the Police Department, but also with the groups and individuals to whom people might take their problems, reports of rumor or demands for action in the event that they would not report them to the Committee directly. A great deal of time has been spent over the past five years in developing these contacts in the community with teachers, business, labor and church leaders. The Committee has developed an important chain that keeps information flowing from the community to the Committee and back again to the people involved.

When a rumor is heard, a complaint received or an incident reported to the Committee which might result in the further circulation of rumor or the creation of tension, an effort is made to determine the true facts. Every case is investigated so that the Committee will have all the background information and facts necessary to prevent an essentially isolated situation from spreading and causing further damage. The information is then given to the people involved in the situation, immediately circulated to white and Negro leaders, organizations and newspapers so that they may be prepared to combat any erroneous reports. Sometimes, however, interpretation of a problem is not enough. In these cases the Mayor's Interracial Committee

takes the lead in getting community leaders and responsible governmental officials together in a "Community Meeting" where they are able to sit down and help work out the major community problem, which is a source of immediate and continuing friction. Presenting the facts about incidents has the immediate affect of arresting the development of tension; the community meeting technique forms the basis on which a solution of the problem can be reached.

In the year 1948 we can see some changes which offer real hope and confidence to the people of Detroit. Although there has been a decline in the number of incidents there is certainly no cause for complacency. Tension and conflict are still an ever present possibility. During 1948, two incidents of major proportion developed to cause much concern to us as a Committee and constituted a real danger to the peace and welfare of Detroit. In both cases the Mayor's Interracial Committee served as intermediary to bridge the gaps between public feelings and resentments and official city action. These two explosive situations, one involving the reaction of people in the community to the shooting of a Negro youth by a Detroit police officer, and the other involving organized community resistance in protest to the movement of two Negro families into a previously "all white" neighborhood, impress upon us the need for continued and prompt action in interracial relations. As a city agency the Committee is neither pro-white nor pro-Negro. The rightness or wrongness of the persons or groups involved is based on a complete investigation of the facts. In this way the Mayor's Interracial Committee helps to provide a realistic and workable basis for the legal and orderly solution of our mutual problems.



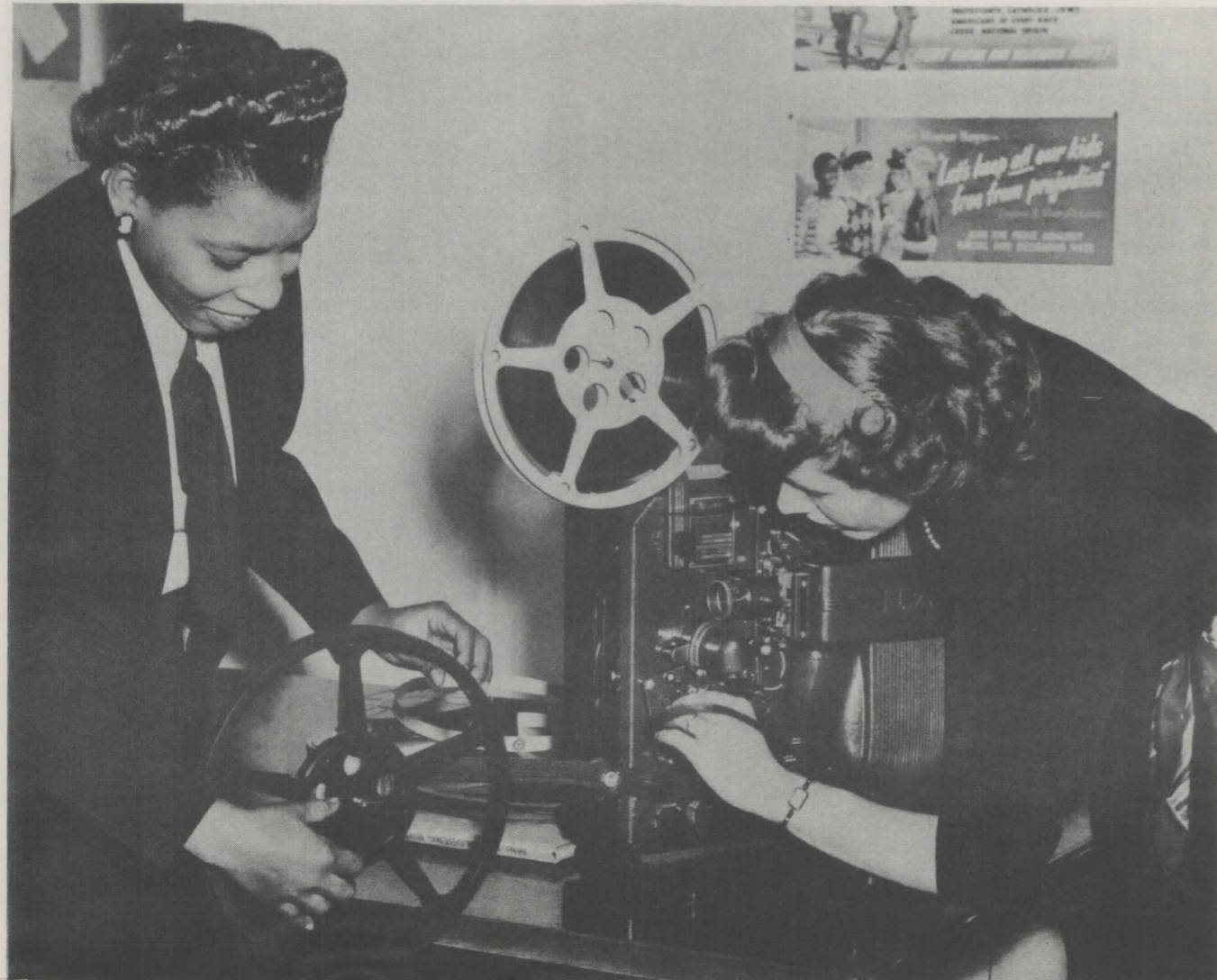
EDUCATION: *Tools for Today's and Tomorrow's Citizens*

Following the fatal clashes in June of 1943 the great mass of responsible Detroit citizens learned and began insisting upon what scattered voices had been requesting for several years: the creation of a long-range program of education to avoid a repetition of the riot and to reduce the frictions arising out of misunderstandings among racial groups.

The Mayor's Interracial Committee saw that it was necessary, in addition to removing the immediate causes for tension and conflict, to try to change the attitudes which cause the conflict, to counteract the false propaganda and information about racial groups and race relations, and to foster good-will, harmony and democratic practices through understanding of the problems of all the people in Detroit. A Speakers' Bureau was organized and volunteer speakers trained to answer the requests of church, club, business and other groups who were seeking information and understanding about racial problems. A Barometer of Community

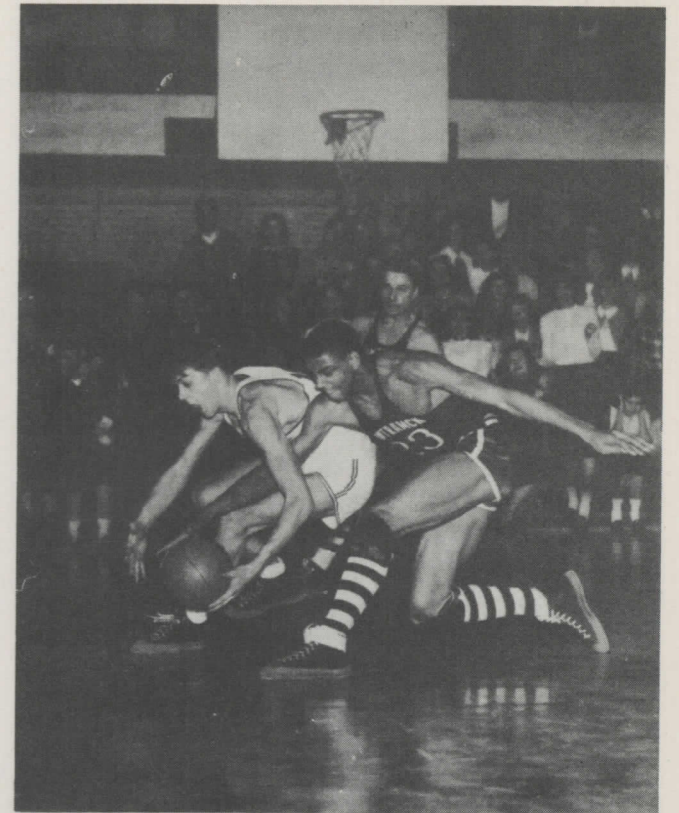
Tensions was designed to show the geographic and problem areas requiring the most immediate attention and to allay rumors of impending riots when no basis in fact existed for them.

The formation of the Popular Education Sub-Committee, consisting of representatives from a dozen agencies in the city, brought the further development and extension of the educational program of the Interracial Committee. This group helped to lay the basis for a consistent and continuing program of education. Efforts were made to coordinate the work of other groups in the city toward the stimulation of people to a constructive awareness of problems in human relations and to supply people and groups with the tools and materials which would make such learning possible and fruitful. Literature and films were widely circulated throughout the community. Posters and blotters and other visual aid materials were designed to disseminate facts about race



and dispel some of the myths and fictions. Finally, attempts were made to institute personnel training programs in the departments of the city government, in addition to the Police Department.

As the work of the educational program progressed, however, two things became evident which caused the Committee to both expand and narrow its objectives. First, people became aware of the fact that prejudice against any specific groups based on race, religion or nationality was a threat to a truly democratic life and that these prejudices had roots buried deep in the economic and cultural fabric in the community. Disseminating the facts and promoting racial tolerance had been big beginnings, but the educational program of the Mayor's Interracial Committee needed to include more than the area of Negro-white relationships. And second, in addition to educating on a general level, it was necessary to devise some more specific and more direct programs and materials which would be of value to those people whose thinking and awareness went beyond the stage of tolerance. Therefore, the content of speaker's talks, group discussions and pamphlet materials began to be directed more toward the actual problem areas of racial and religious discrimination, such as housing, employment,





civil rights, etc. Emphasis centered on the results of prejudiced thinking and behavior, how they affected other groups and what could be done about it. Field trips were organized to bring people into face-to-face contact with individuals and problems of other groups. Leadership training courses were instituted to provide intensive training in dealing with prejudice and discrimination. A series of small conferences was held with employers, real estate operators, mortgage bankers and the like in an attempt to provide information and education in specialized areas. Consultation was given to program chairmen, leaders and staff persons who were attempting to promote educational programs in their own agencies.

From this stimulation of community thinking and interest eventually came a spontaneous demand from many groups that the Mayor's Interracial Committee set up an organization which would provide the framework for coordinating and expanding the activities of all groups who were attempting to do an educational job in the field of human relations in Detroit. As a result of this demand the Coordinating Council for Research and Education in Human Relations was formed under the sponsorship of the Mayor's Interracial Committee. The Council consists of approximately 40 community agencies. During the past two years, the Council has designed new materials, presented radio programs, circulated literature, trained discussion lead-

ers, promoted the use of films, recordings and discussion groups, put out a regular newsletter for the information of people working in this field and conducted an exhibit during the ten days of the 1947 and 1948 State Fair. The Coordinating Council has reached out into the community to point up the need for understanding and action regarding human relations problems and made available to people new and improved tools for coping with prejudice and discrimination.

This brief sketch of "education in human relations" during the past five years would be incomplete were we to regard education as simply something that goes on only in the classrooms of the schools and colleges, or by means of pamphlets, films and speakers. In a very real sense the things which happen and the way people live and act toward other people, in busses, in neighborhoods, in the factories and offices and restaurants in the City of Detroit, are a part of the educational process. It is in these areas that many of the significant changes in the past five years have occurred. A great deal of the education that goes on in the community and in the groups to which people belong takes place so slowly that we are sometimes hardly aware of it.

Yet this goes on, shaping the climate of public opinion, making some things "right" and other things curiously out of step. This is seen most clearly in terms of the changing policies and programs of business, labor, church, cultural and social service agencies over the past five years. Governmental action, too, has come as a result of the changes which are taking place in the attitudes of people. The recent decision of the United States Supreme Court holding that restrictive real estate covenants were unenforceable in the courts came only after due and lengthy process of law had kept the subject a matter of public discussion and court action for four years. The executive order attacking segregation and discrimination in the Armed Forces came almost four years after the urgencies of combat in the Battle of the Bulge had brought Negro and white soldiers together in the battle lines by army order. Campaigns to secure the passage of legislation are educational too. Fair Employment Practice Legislation and measures to abolish the poll tax and lynching have been under study in Congress for years. The newspapers of this country carry these ideas to countless thousands of readers. And, recently, we have seen that State and City Fair Employment Practices Legislation itself has been a profound educational tool where the laws do exist. The actual workings of the law make it possible for persons of differing racial, religious and nationality backgrounds to come to know one another. Strained feelings about "minority groups" begin to disappear in the face of mutual understanding among individuals.

DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES:

For a Free People, For a Better Way of Life

People more and more have become aware of the fact that prejudice, hatred and fear based on the race, religion or nationality of another person or group is not something they are born with or have inherited. Rather, prejudice is seen as a result of social conditioning, a part of our culture, something we learn or are taught, by our parents, neighbors, newspapers, radio, school teachers, or textbooks. People, generally, realize that their attitudes and feelings about other people are being "influenced" day in and day out by the people they meet and the ways of the community in which they live. This newer perspective has, in part, been responsible for the changed way of viewing problems in race relations. Groups and individuals are seen promoting hate and prejudice for their own purposes; discrimination in restaurants, on the job and in the housing market is seen as the system of supports to the prejudices which are so dangerous to the community safety and welfare.

These were the kinds of changes in thinking which took place in Detroit during the war years. In addition, the city-wide activities aimed at preventing further violence and promoting understanding resulted in arousing an entirely new interest in the field of civil rights and action programs to secure those rights. Freedom from prejudice was an important goal, but freedom from the specifics of discrimination based solely on race, color, creed or ancestry became even more important, both to the Committee as it continued to do its work and to people in general as they faced problems in daily living.

The needs of Detroit in the area of guaranteeing the civil rights of all citizens were great, and the resources of the Mayor's Interracial Committee were limited. Nevertheless, the membership of the Committee in 1946 made a careful and detailed examination of the policies and practices in the field of housing, employment and restaurant accommodations in Detroit. In each of the three fields the Committee studied the present practices and policies, attempted to determine what the effects and consequences of these practices were, stated what it believed to be sound principles to guide action for change in each of the fields, made recommendations for taking concrete steps to correct the existing malpractices and injustices, and made known its intention to promote practical programs to put these pro-

posals into effect. The safeguarding of rights in a positive manner had begun. For the Interracial Committee the pattern and system of discrimination in the community now engaged more and more attention.

The weight of a genuine American philosophy was behind this change in the Committee's program emphasis: that equality of opportunity and personal dignity must be guaranteed to all citizens if democratic government was to function effectively and if the skills and potentialities of all people were to be utilized fully. Individuals, groups and organizations in Detroit, already interested in the goal, began increasingly to work to achieve some of the specific objectives of . . . equal economic and job opportunities . . . equal access to housing . . . equal enforcement of the law . . . equal access to the places of public accommodation, to health facilities, to publicly-supported recreational and cultural facilities, and the like.

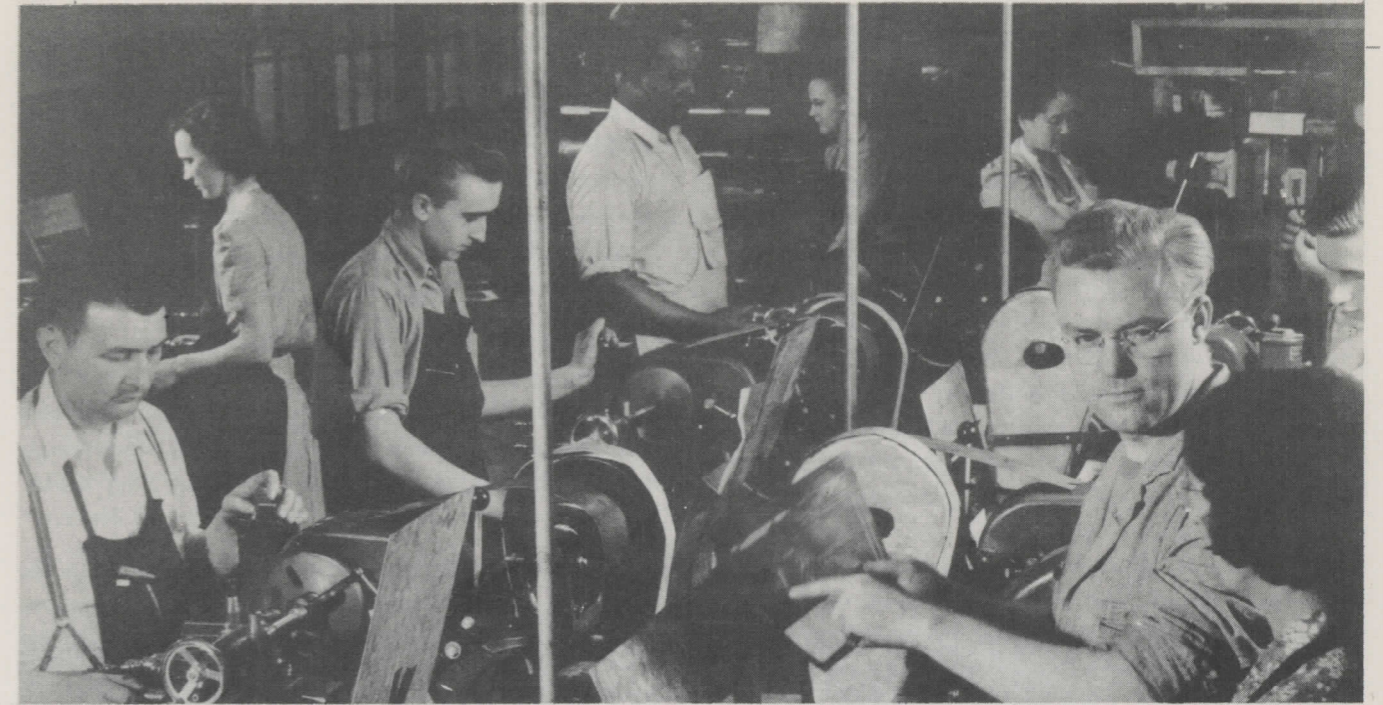


COMMUNITY ACTION: *Bridging the Gap*

Of all the materials that have appeared during the past two years, the Report of the President's Committee on Civil Rights is perhaps the single most significant document to stimulate interest and activity in the field of race relations and civil rights. This document clarifies and gives direction to the thinking of people; it gives evidence to document our weaknesses as a nation in protecting the rights of all people; it points out the responsibilities of government and recommends concrete political actions that can be taken to guarantee these rights. Certainly one of the major results of the Report of the President's Committee has been that countless groups in the country at large and in Detroit in particular have come to see the problems of their local community and ways in which they can, through civic group action, help to implement and guarantee the democratic rights of all people.

While this has been an important stimulus to action in Detroit, the community action activities of the Mayor's Interracial Committee have had a somewhat different beginning. Starting out on the basis of the charges of the Mayor "to make recommendations to improve those services which affect racial relationships that flow from the several departments of government to the community," the Committee was definitely committed to working within the structure of the city government to improve racial relations. In addition, however, because race relations in Detroit was so dependent upon the groups and problems in Detroit at large, community action was by no means limited to working within the framework of city government.

In the first years of the Committee's operations, community action for the purpose of bringing about interracial



understanding and cooperation on broad community problems such as employment, housing, civil rights, health and recreation was achieved by cooperating with other agencies and groups and by participating on study committees and in meetings supporting such programs of action.

A considerable broadening of the Committee's approach to the improvement of race relations in Detroit came when the Committee adopted statements of principle and policy on housing, employment and restaurant discrimination and proceeded with the planning of programs for their implementation. Prior to this, community action was largely concerned with the adjustment of individual complaints in these areas. While this had a real practical value in preventing the development of tensions, the Committee increasingly saw the necessity of coming to grips with the more basic problems out of which the complaints were constantly arising.

The direction of the Committee's thinking was very firmly based. The proper next step that remained was for the Committee to apply to these problems in the areas of government and the community the techniques that were already in use and had proven so effective in the area of tension, that is, to gather all the basic data that has real bearing on the conditions and maintenance of the practices, to engage in a research program to determine local and related attitudes and opinion, to seek out key community leadership, to arrive at a realistic solution and to make progress in changing discrimination and segregation through working conferences of the people most immediately responsible and concerned.

The Mayor's Interracial Committee has good reason for acting in this way. Democracy is not a self-invoking process. It assumes organization and leadership, a channel for expression. The Committee tries to provide that, along with providing a professional service of specialists in the affairs of our community and the relationships among people. The Committee knows that people are aware of the seriousness of the problems which our city faces. A great many business, church, labor, educational and governmental leaders in Detroit are responsible civic-minded citizens who are anxious to support and protect the concept of equality of opportunity. The Committee's job is to see that they get the chance to help work out some of Detroit's most pressing problems.

The community action work of the Mayor's Interracial Committee in 1948 dealt with problems in governmental service and practices in the community. The seriousness of the problems in both areas cannot be minimized. Many of the injustices and malpractices in government and in the community have existed for years and have become so deeply rooted that they are sometimes accepted unwittingly as right and proper. Responsible leaders of government and of the community are to be congratulated for their awareness of the problems which yet remain, for the steady progress they have helped to bring about in the past several years, and for the courage and conviction they express as they take the lead in helping to bring about further changes in the practices of discrimination and segregation which have gotten so dangerously out of step with the times.

POSTSCRIPT: *A Word to Tomorrow*

The problems in race relations which our city faces are very real. Their existence constitutes not only threats to the public peace and safety, but also denials to the rights of equal citizenship and full participation in the public life of the city. People in Detroit are increasingly aware of the seriousness of these problems and the important beginnings which have been made to bring about changes. Yet these problems still remain: Despite the high level of employment, discrimination in job placement is very great. Despite the recent Supreme Court decision invalidating restrictive covenants, the housing market is still far from being free and unrestricted. Despite Michigan's civil rights law, many restaurants and other places of public accommodation continue to evade the requirements of equal service to all persons. There is, also, the necessity to remain watchful of

those factors which have created periodic breakdowns in confidence and respect between police and minority groups, the opportunity for greater equality and fairness in the services of governmental agencies, and the responsibility for removing the restrictions based on race and religion in many privately operated health and recreation facilities.

The problems which Detroit citizens face and many of the inconsistencies in the "democratic American way" can be resolved. The Mayor's Interracial Committee must play a leading role in providing a channel through which change can take place, if we, as a city of many races, many nationalities and many religions, are to control our own future.

This is the challenge for the people of Detroit in the beginning of the year 1949, after five years of progress.

