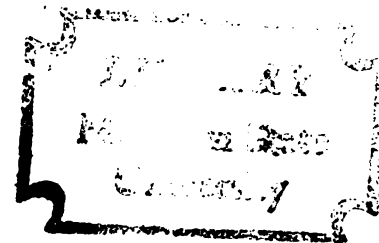


THE HISTORY OF THE GRAND RAPIDS HUMAN RELATIONS
COMMISSION

Dissertation for the Degree of Ph. D.
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
LEWIS B. CLINGMAN
1976



This is to certify that the

thesis entitled

THE HISTORY OF THE GRAND RAPIDS
HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

presented by

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has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

Ph.D. degree in History

Major professor

Date May 3, 1976

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ABSTRACT

THE HISTORY OF THE GRAND RAPIDS HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

By

Lewis B. Clingman

The Grand Rapids Human Relations Commission began operations in April, 1955, after two years of study and preparation. The work of the Commission in its early years was concentrated chiefly on the education of city officials, educational systems, and the community at large to the problems of minorities in employment, housing, education, recreation, and health. The new state Constitution of 1964 gave to the State Civil Rights Commission many of the primary responsibilities in the areas of employment and civil rights.

Prior to World War II the minority population of Grand Rapids was extremely low, less than 3% of the total population of 165,000. This percentage grew to 11% between 1945 and 1960 with nearly 85% of the Black migrants coming from the deep south, chiefly the states of Mississippi, Alabama and Arkansas. The new arrivals settled in one of the oldest residential sections in town which had been previously inhabited almost entirely by Dutch

immigrants from the Netherlands. The newly arrived Blacks competed for employment with second and third generation Slavs, predominantly Polish and Lithuanian. The situation was not unique to Grand Rapids but greatly intensified by ethnic intellectual and geographic prejudice.

The Human Relations Commission achieved some major success in various aspects of education within the public school system. The Commission never even attempted to influence the private schools directly in spite of the fact that they housed 40% of the total school age population. Grand Rapids had the highest percentage of students in non-public schools for any city in the state of Michigan. The Commission succeeded in having its open housing ordinance adopted into law but failed to obtain low cost housing for minorities or better employment opportunities.

The Commission was most often dependent upon its Executive Director in all phases of activities and was unable to accept the fact that he was a civil service employee and therefore responsible to the City Manager and City Commission for promotion, staff, and budget.

In general, the Commission was more effective as a study committee than as an action group. Also, the Commission spent too much of its time on internal housekeeping details. Nevertheless, it did assist in the maintenance of peace when the concept of Black Power changed the existing minority attitude of "gradualism" to one of "immediatism." The Commission came to an end in 1968 when

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the City Commission reconstituted the Human Relations Commission as the Community Relations Commission with only advisory powers to the executive head of the new Grand Rapids Department of Human Relations.

THE HISTORY OF THE GRAND RAPIDS
HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

By

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of History

1976

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CHAPTER I

THE GENESIS OF A HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

The City of Grand Rapids, an urban community of some 200,000 people, had an extremely low percentage of Negro population in the early 1950s. Only a few citizens recognized the trend to isolate and discriminate against the Blacks, and attempted to prevent, or at least ameliorate, future racial conflicts which became so common and so widespread throughout urban America in the last half of the following decade. Although these interested citizens failed to realize that no simple panacea could remedy completely the serious and complex problems and discontent evidenced by minority groups or races, their attempt to prevent future "summer madness" of racial discontent merits serious study.

Far smaller and less complex than cities like Detroit or Chicago, a study of the ways and means taken in the City of Grand Rapids offers a microcosm of the problems of the larger urban centers. Grand Rapids, generally, had greater success in preserving law and order than most northern cities, but like them failed to solve the fundamental problems of all minorities, namely, housing, employment, and education.

A new reform political group, calling itself the "Citizens Action" party, obtained control of Grand Rapids city government in February, 1951. The new party failed, by a substantial margin, to obtain the support of the voters for a new city charter. The rejected charter contained provisions for the establishment of a Human Relations Commission which would have dealt with the obviously increasing interracial and inter-group problems. A small, but extremely vocal, group of Grand Rapids citizens continued to pressure the City Commission to appoint such an agency. However, the city fathers were not convinced of either the need for or the value of such a new civic agency but did approve unanimously the appointment of a seven member "Study Committee" to survey the entire subject and to suggest "a possible program of Human Relations" for Grand Rapids.¹ Mayor Paul Goebel made the formal appointments to this intergroup relations Study Committee some six months later.

The chief concern of the advocates for the establishment of a Human Relations Commission was the very rapid increase of the Black population after 1945. Prior to the end of World War II, the Negro population of the city was extremely low when compared to other Northern urban communities.² The Federal Census of 1950

¹Grand Rapids City Commission, Official Proceedings, Nov. 11, 1952.

²Rodger Rice, "A Study of Negroes in Grand Rapids," May, 1959, Grand Rapids Human Relations Document File No. 35. (Hereinafter referred to as Doc. File.) This study contains the following table of statistics extracted from the Federal Census Records:

indicated that the Black population of the city had increased from 2% to 4% in ten years. Grand Rapids was still far below the urban average of the state which was 10%; Detroit's population was 16%, Flint's 9% and Muskegon Heights 24%.³

The Black population increase was caused almost entirely by migration from Southern States. In 1958 only 10% of the city's Negroes were native born whereas over 75% had been born in one of the Southern States, Mississippi alone contributing nearly 45% and Arkansas an additional 12%. The migrants formed their own "state clubs" and these social-recreational units of state origin remained active for almost ten years.⁴

The rapid increase of the Black population created physical and psychological problems for the two major ethnic groups of the city, the Dutch and the Polish. After the original trading post had been established in 1833 by French-speaking Louis Campau and his relatives at the site of the falls in the Grand River, the

<u>Year</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Increase</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Negro Increase</u>		<u>% of Negroes of Total</u>
				<u>Number</u>	<u>%</u>	
1900	87,656	---	---	604	--	0.7
1910	112,571	25,066	28.6	664	10.1	0.6
1920	137,571	25,063	22.3	1,079	63.9	0.8
1930	168,592	30,958	22.5	2,956	171.2	1.8
1940	164,292	-4,300	-2.6	2,725	-7.8	1.7
1950	176,515	12,223	7.4	6,912	153.7	3.9
1960	177,314	1,201	0.7	14,778	213.7	8.3

³Donald B. Bouma, "Challenges of Our Expanding Community," Lecture Series, No. 3, pg. 5, Official Files, Grand Rapids Human Relations Commission. (Hereinafter referred to as "Off. Files.")

⁴Wilbur Warren, Project Director, Grand Rapids Neighborhood Youth Corps., Interview, Jan. 8, 1968.

population growth of the city had come chiefly from Anglo-Saxon stock migrating from New England and the central and western section of New York State. Few Europeans arrived until after 1849 when some of the Netherlands Dutch moved into the area in the wake of Pastor Albertus C. Van Raalte's colonization of nearby Holland, Michigan, in 1847. Migrants from the Hudson River Valley region of New York had established a local Dutch Reformed Church in Grand Rapids in 1838. This religious body, with several generations of residence in America, could no longer speak Dutch and the language barrier constituted a major point of difference between the two segments of the same church. The English speaking members of the Reformed Church aided financially in the establishment of a new and separate church for the immigrants and division along linguistic lines continued well into the next century. Doctrinal differences developed later, and several "splinter" groups emerged within the new immigrant group; nevertheless, language remained as the essential cohesive force for the "Grand Rapids Dutch."⁵

The second ethnic group affected by the rapid increase of the Black population was the Polish. First arriving in considerable numbers in the 1850s, they were not completely welcomed by the older, English speaking residents of their own Catholic Church.

⁵Z. Z. Lydens, ed., The Story of Grand Rapids (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publishing Co., 1965), pp. 95-102. This popular work, prepared by the Grand Rapids Historical Commission, was the first published city history since 1918. Some 70,000 item cards, presently available to students at Ryerson Public Library, were used to prepare this readable and accurate narrative.

Although no real doctrinal differences developed, ethnic unity was retained for two or three generations by the creation of national ethnic churches and social organizations. Three distinctly Polish parishes developed along national lines in the north and west sections of the city. As in other American cities the "old" Polish immigrant considered himself superior to the "new" immigrant; both were looked down on by the "American" Catholic because of the language problem. The Dutch group, according to U. S. Census figures of 1950 on foreign stocks, extrapolated to allow for differences in length of residence, indicated that approximately one-half of the city's total population were of Dutch ancestry and about one-fifth were of Polish background. Other national groups listed were German, Canadian, British, Scandinavian, Lithuanian, Irish, and Italians; none of these appear to have been seriously affected by the heavy influx of the Southern Blacks.

The Negro migration into the city following World War II affected the Dutch and Polish ethnic groups in different manners. The only dwelling units available to the new, non-white migrants were located in the area on the near south-east side of the G. River, adjacent to the business center of the city. The Dutch land owners in this area were moving further away from the center of town as the dwellings were rapidly deteriorating with age. The homes made available to the Negroes were among the oldest in the city and, frequently, in very poor condition. At the same time, there was a conscious effort to contain the Black population.

in a single geographical area approximately one mile square. Renting or selling to Blacks constituted good business; living in the immediate area with Blacks was another thing entirely.

Whereas the Dutch were concerned with the economics of real estate values in relation to Black population increase, the Polish were concerned with the economics of job competition. The Polish had had little or no previous contact with Negroes; therefore, where the Polish ethnic pockets located anywhere near to the developing "Black Belt." The housing problems of the Blacks did not concern the Polish. Their major concern was the economics of job opportunity. This fear of economic competition was greatly enhanced by their ignorance and stereotyped concepts of Black people.

This fear of job competition by the newly arrived Black migrants was not without a foundation in reality. The Polish workers held a high percentage of the semi-skilled and labor positions in both the furniture industry and the construction trades. The Negro constituted a definite employment threat in labor positions which required little or no training skills. In fact, however, employers were very reluctant to hire Blacks for janitorial maintenance service since white employers held the same stereotyped attitudes regarding Blacks as did their employees.

Mayor Goebel's newly appointed Intergroup Relations Committee was not cognizant as to how a municipal commission could effectively solve the racial problems of housing or employment. In fact, the members of the commission were uncertain as to

they should even begin their study until they met in May, 1953, with Mr. George Schermer, Director of the Mayor's Interracial Committee of Detroit for nine years, and subsequently director of the Philadelphia Committee on Human Relations. Mr. Schermer outlined the three obligatory procedural principles which he had derived from the study and analysis of nearly seventy-five Human Relations Commissions of various types throughout the country. The Commission's first responsibility was to identify and solve actual existing problems arising from differences in race, nationality, creed, or color. Secondly, discriminatory practices in employment, housing, economics, education, and law should be eliminated through education and enforcement of existing anti-discrimination laws. The conciliation duties of the Commission should be of particular importance in a city where the ethnic division was so definite and obvious.

The geographical ethnic growth pattern in the city had been so firm that there was a definite lack of meaningful communications between the various national ethnic divisions as well as between the races. Even within a single national group, such as the Dutch or the Polish, conflicting sub-groups developed. Conflict was evident even within single religious groups as seen on the common ground of Catholic Central High School where the Irish, Polish, and the Italian students contested with each other; similar differentials were noted among the Dutch bilingual Christian Reformed Church and the English speaking Reformed Church.

The white majority had had very little or no previous experience in dealing with racial problems since the movement of Negroes into the city on a large scale did not begin until the middle of World War II. The extended migration for the next decade produced still another division; the Grand Rapids born Negro tended to resent and look down upon the recent Southern arrivals. The Study Committee realized that the proposed Human Relations Commission would not be a panacea for all intergroup problems. However, similar commissions were moderately successful in other cities and should constitute a major step toward solving problems in the city of Grand Rapids. Finally, the commission should promote positive programs of various types to improve communications and understanding between various groups.⁶

An immediate problem for the Commission would be to work with the City Planning Commission to find adequate accommodations for the housing of families displaced by proposed urban renewal and expressway projects. Race Relations Director, William H. H. of the U.S. Housing and Home Finance Agency, stated that the city would be eligible for these federal rehabilitation programs only if these families displaced were relocated in adequate accommodations at prices or rentals they could afford.⁷

Following Mr. Schermer's recommendations, the Study Committee conducted thirty-five sessions, some private and some

⁶Grand Rapids Study Committee on Human Relations, "Report to the Grand Rapids City Commission" (July 31, 1954), pp. 1-2. (Hereinafter referred to as "Study Report.") Doc. File No. 29

⁷Grand Rapids Herald, April 17, 1953.

public, in which representatives from thirty-five organizations, and a wide cross-section of the general public were interviewed. All people interviewed were encouraged to express their opinions fully, and, if possible, to submit their recommendations in writing. Representatives from the National Association of Intergroup Officials (NAIRO) also provided valuable information from other existing commissions. The interviews clearly identified six fields of discrimination practiced against minorities, namely employment, housing, education, health and welfare services, recreation, and civil protection.

Employment

The data collected relative to employment of non-white citizens indicated that the vast majority of the Black population were working in menial jobs or as service personnel, such as janitors, bus-boys, dishwashers, or elevator operators. Few non-whites were hired for positions in which they would serve the general public directly. There was only one Black sales clerk employed in the entire city. Very few Blacks worked in the building and trade industries except as basic laborers and apprenticeship training programs were extremely limited. "On-the-job" training programs for senior high school students, arranged through the Board of Education, were so limited in scope and number as to constitute definite encouragement for the non-white youth to drop out of school prior to graduation because of a lack of job incentive.⁸

⁸Ibid., pp. 4-5.

The percentage of objectively discriminatory job orders received at the local office of the Michigan State Employment Service had decreased somewhat but at this time the state agency could not demand elimination of discriminatory employment terms. If the agency could not persuade an employer to withdraw his discriminatory specifications, the order was filled as requested. NAACP representatives alleged that white employees were generally promoted even when non-whites with greater seniority, merit, and ability were available.⁹

The testimony presented to the study committee indicated that the black man was the last to be hired generally and the first to be laid off in a period of work contraction since very few whites qualified for job protection through labor union seniority rules. Also, the earning power of the non-white worker was too low to permit accumulation of sufficient savings to carry over a period of unemployment regardless how short. Finally, it was alleged, but little or no empirical evidence produced at the time that the poor employment opportunities contributed heavily to other problems which plagued the Black community, such as housing, education, health and sanitation, and juvenile delinquency. All members of the Study Committee agreed verbally that better employment patterns would improve all these related problems.¹⁰

⁹ Ibid., pp. 5-7.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 7-8.

In spite of general popular opinion to the contrary, only a few local instances were reported where difference of race, color, religion, or national origin had resulted in internal disturbance or conflict among the workers.

The Study Committee concluded that a municipal Human Relations Commission could aid greatly in solving of employment problems of minority persons by encouraging employers to open more positions to non-whites, and by advising on ways and means for integrating minority people into the total work force, by helping the Board of Education officials to expand Negro vocational training, and by encouraging the inclusion of non-discriminatory clauses in union contracts. Previous experiences of similar commissions in Detroit and Chicago, as evidenced in annual reports on file at NAIRO headquarters, seemed to support these contentions.

Housing

The local chapter of the Urban League, assisted by many church, social, and municipal agencies, and with the official approval of Mayor George W. Welsh, explored thoroughly the housing problems of Negroes in Grand Rapids.¹¹ This report indicated that there were few multiple dwelling units in the city except those apartments created in old, large homes. The 1930 Federal Census indicated that the city ranked third in the industrial centers of

¹¹Grand Rapids Urban League, "Housing and Blighted Area Survey, Grand Rapids, 1949," Doc. File No. 35; See also: Dorothy Judd, Our City Government (Grand Rapids: League of Women Voters, 1948), pp. 508, Doc. File No. 35.

the nation in percentages of home owners, and three-fifths of all dwelling units were owner occupied.

New residential construction had come to a virtual halt in 1926. During the entire decade of the 1930s the number of new units built was less than three-fifths of the number of new families in the city. In no year between 1926 and 1946 were a sufficient number of new homes built to provide for the normal increase in family population. Forty-five percent of the families lived in converted single family homes with as many as four families to a single dwelling.¹²

The minimum shortage of proper dwelling units in 1949 was set at 2,327. This total did not include replacements for the dangerous, sub-standard houses still occupied nor the temporary, make-shift quarters being utilized. A conservative estimate of housing needs, with allowance for population growth, was set at 5,113 as of December, 1949. The "ghetto mile" near the center of the city was bounded by Wealthy Street on the north, Franklin on the south, Eastern Avenue on the east, and the Grand River on the west. Prior to World War II this area had housed chiefly the Dutch immigrant group and their descendents. Although some Negro families were financially capable of affording housing in other areas, only three had found homes available to them outside the ghetto in the previous ten years. Moreover, approximately four thousand Spanish-speaking Americans from the Southwest part of

¹²Ibid.

Texas had migrated into the city since 1943, and the few families which had come from Puerto Rico after 1950, found dwelling units available to them only within the Black ghetto or immediately contiguous thereto.

Grand Rapids had never had a separate geographic area of high Jewish concentration, but evidence indicated some anti-Semitic discrimination existed in rental housing. Anti-Semetism had increased after Hitler's rise in 1933 and some restrictive covenants against the sale or rental of homes to Jewish families had been reported; the practice had declined after 1945. The statement relative to anti-Semitic discrimination was included in the final report with a recommendation for further investigation. As a matter of record, subsequent complaints in this area were too few to merit further investigation which indicated the anti-Semitic housing problem was never serious.

Over 60% of the non-white housing units were owner occupied according to the Federal Census of 1950. The local chapter of the Urban League presented statistics which indicated that lack of available housing units frequently forced Blacks to purchase sub-standard or deteriorated housing within the ghetto for higher prices than the homes were worth on the open market. The new rental dwelling units constructed after 1945 were not available to non-whites and no such units had been built within the ghetto because of scarcity of vacant land. Contractors discovered that the major lending institutions considered ghetto construction a

poor investment risk because of increasing deterioration of this segregated square mile.¹³

The most common practice of racial discrimination noted was the "Gentlemen's Agreement," a commitment made by property owners and real estate brokers or agents not to sell or rent to Negroes, Mexicans (sic.), Semitic, and other "undesirables" outside of specifically designated and well defined areas. The National Association of Real Estate Boards clearly sanctioned discrimination based on race and nationality in sale of property until November, 1950. The Association's Code of Ethics, Article 34, read:

A realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood a character of property or occupancy, members of any race or nationality, or any individual whose race or nationality, or any individual whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in that neighborhood.¹⁴

The Study Committee found no evidence that the NAREB had ever enforced, or even threatened to enforce, this provision of the ethical code. However, real estate brokers and dealers followed this practice for several years after the NAREB had deleted all reference to race and nationality from its code. Moreover, it was made obvious that Black doctors, lawyers, and dentists experienced great difficulty in obtaining office space in buildings where their white professional counterparts were housed.¹⁵

¹³Grand Rapids Urban League, "Study of Housing," August, 1952, Doc. File No. 35; (See also: Community Family Life Clinic, "Housing in Grand Rapids and the Metropolitan Area," August, 1952, Doc. File No. 35.)

¹⁴Grand Rapids Human Relations Commission, "Official Minutes," July 11, 1956. (Hereinafter referred to as "Off. Min.")

¹⁵Background of Real Estate and Lending Agencies' Policies on Home Sales and Loans to Minorities, "Doc. File No. 26."

Real Estate agents attempted to justify their refusal to sell, or even show, houses in all white areas to potential non-white buyers. They claimed that the Supreme Court of the State of Michigan had ruled on the legality of restrictive covenants on land sales or property rentals and submitted to the members of the Study Committee documents from Mr. Thomas Read, State Attorney General in 1940, in support of their position. Mr. Read reported that the Michigan Supreme Court had decided that restrictions against the sale of land to non-whites were void and illegal. However, he cited various cases which determined that while non-whites could buy land legally, it was permissible to restrict occupancy of that same area to Caucasians only. The representative of the Grand Rapids Real Estate Board, (GRREB), supported restrictive covenants on three counts: (1) the "fact" that entrance of non-whites into previously all white neighborhood automatically and necessarily resulted in property value depreciation of the entire contiguous area; (2) Negroes did not take care of their property which lowered the value of land in the entire area; (3) Negroes were not financially reliable and more frequently defaulted in their payment schedules. No positive evidence was submitted to substantiate these generalities in spite of the vehement objections raised by members of the Study Committee.¹⁷

¹⁶Letter, Mr. Thomas Read to Mr. Clarence W. Lock, May 2, 1940, Doc. File No. 100.

¹⁷"Study Report," p. 12; See also: Warren M. Banner, "Negro Population in Grand Rapids, Mich., 1940." Interracial Committee, Council of Social Agencies (contained in "Study Report")

Housing segregation in Grand Rapids appeared to be reaching, if indeed it had not already reached, a critical point. The minority population increased 5% between 1940 and 1950 whereas dwelling units within the ghetto had declined. By 1950 overcrowding (as defined by the Federal Bureau of Census as units containing more than 1.5 persons per room) was five times greater in the ghetto mile than it was for the city as a whole. Statistically, the average non-white family had more persons than the average white family and lived in homes substantially smaller. Moreover, four Black families out of every ten found it necessary to take in roomers in order to balance the high cost housing and the low Negro family income.¹⁸ Twenty percent of the dwelling units in the segregated area were classified as being in "poor" condition, that is, in need of major repair. Rental units were owned generally by whites who frequently were not overly concerned in maintaining proper sanitation standards, fire protection, and repairs since the tenants had little choice in moving elsewhere.¹⁹

The Study Committee concluded that a Municipal Human Relations Commission could help solve some of the minorities' housing problems. The agency could work with private builders and mortgage bankers to provide more and better homes and it could aid the members of the Real Estate Board to overcome

¹⁸Grand Rapids Urban League, "A Study of Housing in Selected Areas of Grand Rapids, Supplement," Nov. 1, 1952, Doc. File No. 35.

¹⁹"Study Report," p. 15.

prejudice. Similar agencies had had some success in this field in other cities. Such an official agency of the city would of necessity work with other municipal agencies, such as the City Health and Inspection Departments, to effect improvements in overcrowding or inadequate housing by forcing owners of rental units to meet the minimum standards of sanitation established by municipal legislation. Above all, a Human Relations Commission could act as counselor and intermediary between the races to aid in the elimination of prejudice and in the neutralization of negative rumors. It could create a better understanding between the old and new residents of an area and thereby discourage "panic selling" and rapid exodus of whites from racially changing neighborhoods. In this manner property value could be stabilized and the developing tensions between whites and non-whites decreased.

Education of Minorities

The Study Committee limited its investigation of minority education to the Public School system. This limitation was probably necessary but it was unfortunate since 40% of Grand Rapids' students attended private or parochial schools, chiefly Catholic or Christian Reformed institutions. Grand Rapids had the highest ratio of students attending non-public school of any city in the State. Very few Blacks were members of either of these denominations, the majority being Baptists; even fewer could afford the high tuition costs of private education even if they desired it.

The Public School system was totally committed to the concept of the Neighborhood School. This concept forced the student to attend the school physically located in the area in which the parents lived. Exceptions to the rule were rare and involved chiefly students enrolled in some type of special education. Since the Black housing pattern was concentrated within a one square mile area, a high percentage of Black students in its schools was inevitable. Moreover, schools in, or contiguous to, the ghetto area were already overcrowded by 1950.

No new school had been built in the city between 1926 and 1946 because of problems of the depression and war restrictions after 1940. In the late 1940s an extensive building program provided new schools near the periphery of the city because population movement from old to new housing developments necessitated them. Little or no school construction was even projected for the inner city areas.

The problem of non-white concentration in a few schools had become serious by January, 1954. The 1,695 Negro children of school age constituted 7.6% of the total school enrollment. Ninety-one percent of these children attended one of four schools, Franklin, Sheldon, Henry, or Vandenberg, all located within the geographic confines of the established ghetto. The Board of Education's annual census report indicated a four fold increase of Negro students in these schools and a rapid transition toward

a near total Negro school population.²⁰ It was axiomatic that the number of white students declined in proportion to increase of Negro students. Whenever a school population became over 50% non-white, as had happened in three of the four schools listed, there was a marked acceleration of movement of white families out of the school district. Furthermore, many children of white families still living in the transitional school district were permitted to transfer to other schools for racial reasons, in violation of official school policy.

The Board of Education was accused of following a discriminatory policy relative to hiring or assignment of Black teachers. The first qualified Negro teacher was hired in 1948 and, by 1954, there were eleven Black teachers in the system. Eight of these teachers were assigned in schools rapidly approaching total Black student bodies; two were assigned to South High School which had a substantial Negro population. One Black elementary school teacher was teaching in an elementary school with a low Black student ratio. The question arose as to whether Negro teachers were hired to teach Negro children or whether they would be utilized throughout the entire school system.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 18-19.

<u>School</u>	<u>Number of Negro Pupils</u>		<u>Percentage of Total Enrollment</u>	
	<u>1940</u>	<u>1953</u>	<u>1940</u>	<u>1953</u>
Henry	111	191	38%	80%
Franklin	86	409	19%	78%
Sheldon	45	339	8%	61%
Vandenberg	14	135	3%	25%

The Study Committee became increasingly aware of the problem of school segregation of a "de facto" nature. Studies of similar patterns in other cities indicated that "de facto" segregation was dangerous to both the white and non-white communities and tended to depress the level of education in the segregated schools. Finally, segregated education seriously hindered good communications between the races and strengthened and perpetuated prejudice. The Committee believed the public school system could and should be the most logical and strategic institution for reduction of racial prejudice. Since prejudice was an acquired, not an inherited trait, schools could do much to nullify, or at least neutralize, the perpetuation of racial prejudice from one generation to another. Decline of prejudice among the children might even affect advantageously the thinking and attitudes of the parents.

An official municipal agency, working with school officials, could aid in the initiation of a positive interracial and inter-group program including curricular changes and acquisition of inter-cultural educational materials to combat prejudice. Such a Commission could provide constructive in-service training programs for teachers and school administrators. It could assist in the elimination of segregation patterns of teacher and student placements without causing undue protests from parents. Commissions in other cities had reported "fair" to "good" achievement results in the general field of education.²¹

²¹Ibid., pp. 16-23.

Health and Welfare Services

The Study Committee acquired relatively little material on minority problems in the area of civic health and welfare services. It was discovered that the three major hospitals, Blodgett Memorial, Butterworth, and St. Mary's, accepted patients and rendered services without regard to color although there were complaints of racial segregation of assignments of patients in the wards and semi-private rooms. There were no Black resident physicians or interns in any of the hospitals and only one Negro extern at St. Mary's Hospital. Both Blodgett and St. Mary's Hospital accepted Black girls in their nursing training programs and utilized Black nurses on their staffs. All three hospitals hired Negro practical nurses for floor duty. Some non-whites were employed in secretarial and laboratory positions and St. Mary's Hospital had a Negro dietician. All the hospitals in the area employed non-white personnel in their maintenance departments.²²

Outside the hospital there was relatively little overt discrimination. Most of the city's practicing physicians accepted patients without regard to color, although a few individual exceptions were noted. The three Negro physicians practicing in the area were members of a hospital's staff. There were numerous complaints of refusal of services to non-whites by dentists. No complaints of racial discrimination were registered against any of the publicly operated clinics or social service agency.²³

²²Ibid., pp. 23-25.

²³Ibid., pp. 25-27.

The Committee believed that a municipal commission could assist in obtaining additional opportunities in the area of nursing training for minorities, as had been done by the Toledo Commission. The achievements of the Minneapolis Commission indicated action to be taken to increase the number of opportunities for minority interns, externs, and resident physicians in the hospitals. Certainly, a municipal commission could assess the damage resulting from discrimination to the health of non-white people through a study of relative mortality rates.²⁴

In public accommodations, the Michigan Civil Rights Law of 1954 stipulated that all persons, regardless of color or national origin, were entitled to full and equal facilities and privileges in all hotels, motels, restaurants, and amusement and recreational parks intended for the general public. Nevertheless, many of these accommodations were not open to non-whites. No "declared" policy of discrimination was reported to the Study Committee but actual conditions clearly reflected the extent to which minority groups participated in public recreational activities. Certainly, little if any effort was made to encourage non-whites to participate in the city's recreational programs located outside the Black residential area. Mr. Frederick See, Superintendent of Parks, testified that additional recreational facilities were badly needed in the central city.²⁵

²⁴Ibid., pp. 27-28.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 28-29.

The Committee noted that the Human Relations Commission in New York City, Cincinnati, Detroit, and Chicago had been extremely active and successful in the recreational field. The Commission could work with managers of various types of community recreation facilities to end existing discriminatory practices, assist community service agencies to promote inter-racial activities and place qualified non-whites on their permanent staffs. Training sessions with both public and private recreational agencies could develop greater understanding of the problems of minority peoples.

The Committee noted that in the thirty-five years of activity in the city, the Boy Scouts of America, supported by United Community Service funds, had developed only two scout troops servicing the segregated area housing over ten thousand people. The District Executive of the Grand Valley Council of Boy Scouts of America, claimed that three out of every four youths wanted to join the organization but he had been unable to obtain either facilities or sponsorship for scout troops within the inner-city area.²⁶

Civil Protection

Testimony presented to the Study Committee indicated to the surprise of its members, that there was less discrimination in the field of civil protection than in any other area. The Police Department employed thirteen non-white policemen,

²⁶Ibid., p. 30.

approximately 5% of the total force. Police Detective Captain Walter Coe, was a Negro; he headed a unit of white and non-white officers which handled complaints brought both by and against individuals of minority groups. The Superintendent of Police stated that Negro members of the force had equal opportunity for advancement but the representative of the NAACP pointed out that no black patrolman had been promoted to sergeant within the previous ten years. The department claimed there was no discrimination in law enforcement, a claim challenged by representatives of minority groups.²⁷

The Study Commission reported that a municipal agency could develop with the Police Department special recruit and in-service training courses on intergroup relations as had been done successfully in many cities through the nation. A Commission could arrange neighborhood meetings and conferences whenever and where needed to correct real or alleged claims of discrimination. Subsequent events appeared to substantiate the claim that police discrimination against Blacks did exist among some members of the force. It also became evident that many of the minority people did not trust the police and many, especially among the younger generation, considered the police to be their natural enemy. A municipal commission might help to correct this situation.²⁸

The Grand Rapids Study Committee completed its research and submitted to the Mayor and City Commission in March 1954 a

²⁷Ibid., pp. 29-30.

²⁸Ibid., p. 33.

formal request for a charter amendment which would establish a municipal Human Relations Commission. This lengthy report, with an extensive appendix of supporting documents, concluded that there was a definite need for such an agency. The new unit of government, with the authority of the City government backing it, could act as liaison between various departments, such as the Board of Education, the Planning Commission, police and fire departments, recreation and health departments, as well as with the various minority groups or their representative agencies. The Commission could serve as a sounding board to voice grievances in public rather than permit these grievances to grow and fester in silent darkness until a riot stage was reached.

A municipal commission would not duplicate the work of private organizations or agencies but would act as a clearing house for ideas and programs from which all could draw inspirations, ideas, and help. The committee estimated the operating cost of the Commission would be far beneath the actual savings to the city which would be effected. The committee believed the new agency could increase the buying power of the under-utilized minorities according to their highest skill, develop housing and other programs, reduce fire and police inequalities, and aid general welfare problems. The Commission obviously would not solve all problems of intergroup relations, but could be of vital assistance in many different areas. Finally, the intangible losses to the life of the city by people of minority groups who lived in a constant state of tension and suspicion could not be

reckoned purely in terms of dollars and cents. The real question seemed to be, could the city of Grand Rapids afford not to have a Human Relations Commission.²⁹

The Report recommended that the Commission have the power to initiate programs of education, conciliation, and coordination of activities of various groups in the total community as well as within the City Hall itself. The Commission should institute extended and detailed research, and analysis of data, on practical problems related to intergroup and interracial activities. Specific study determining what, if any, actual effects resulted when non-white families moved into a hitherto predominantly all-white neighborhood should be started immediately.³⁰

On recommendation of the new Mayor, George Veldman, the Study Committee held a final public hearing on May 24, 1954.³¹ The Committee submitted to the Mayor and City Commission its complete report, together with a proposed amendment to the City Charter, on July 31, 1954. The proposed ordinance would establish a Human Relations Commission of fifteen to twenty-one members, with an estimated first year budget of fifteen thousand dollars for salaries of an Executive Director, an Assistant Director, and a Clerk-Stenographer.³²

²⁹Report of the President's Committee on Civil Rights, 1947,
p. 145.

³⁰"Study Report," pp. 46-47.

³¹Letter, Mr. Harry J. Kelly to the Honorable George Veldman, May 11, 1954, Doc. File No. 29.

³²Grand Rapids Press, May 25, 1954.



The Mayor and City Commissioners met with the members of the Study Committee at a luncheon meeting on August 5, 1954.

Mr. Kelly described the events of the meeting to Mr. George Schermer who had been brought into the city to advise in the early stages of investigation:

I was naive enough to believe that we could get an acceptance of our proposal on that occasion, and that shortly we would have authorization to go ahead and look for a Director. I had a carefully prepared Agenda for the meeting; during the course of the work of our Study Committee, I had assigned to each of the six members definite responsibilities covering the areas of employment, housing, education, health & welfare, recreation, and civil protection. In the preparation of my Agenda--since I was going to be the Chairman--I had hoped I could get the Mayor, City Commissioners, City Attorney, and others present to follow my program which was to call upon each of these Committee Members in turn, to present a 4 or 5 minute summary of what had been found in the respective areas of study. Well, it's a long story, and there is no point in relating it now--but I failed, so our meeting was a whole lot less effective than I had hoped it would be. It almost seemed that the City Officials wanted to talk about most everything except the matter at hand. So the meeting adjourned without action, except the Mayor stated that it was a nice meeting, and that he hoped within a short time we could get together again as his guests.³³

³³Letter, Mr. Harry Kelly to Mr. George Schermer, October 21, 1954.

The City Commission failed to take immediate action because it was not convinced that a Human Relations Commission was required. Moreover, the Commissioners doubted that the achievements of the proposed Commission would justify new budget costs.

CHAPTER II

LEGISLATING A COMMISSION, 1955

Mayor Veldman and the City Manager met with Mr. Kelly and his commission in October, 1954. At that time the City Manager suggested that the appointment of a citizens committee would eliminate the need of hiring a specialist in the field of inter-group relations. The meeting ended with the compromise that Mr. Schermer again be invited to Grand Rapids to explain the need for a specialist as director. Mr. Schermer's subsequent visit failed to produce any immediate action. The Official Proceedings of the City Commission records but one mention of a Human Relations Commission in seven months--a letter from a member of the NAACP favoring the creation of the Commission. This letter was "received and filed."¹

Mr. Orval Hoxie, 2nd Ward Commissioner, introduced a resolution to the City Commission on February 8, 1955 which would create a seven member Human Relations Commission appointed by the Mayor with the advice and consent of the entire Commission. The resolution contained no mention of the office of an Executive

¹Proceedings of the City Commission (May 3, 1954 through May 2, 1955), p. 678, File No. 1822.

Director. It was referred to the Ordinance Committee with instruction to draft and report its recommendations within thirty days.²

The Ordinance Committee recommended, March 15, 1955, the adoption of "AN ORDINANCE TO ESTABLISH A HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION. . . ." The recommendation included the positions of an Executive and Assistant Executive Director. Nine months after the report had been submitted, the City Commission, on April 5, 1955, passed by unanimous vote Ordinance No. 1396: "TO ESTABLISH A HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION. . . ."³ The ordinance stated that since prejudice and discrimination were inimical to democracy and a menace to peace and public welfare, the Human Relations Commission was to assist the city to keep peace among all citizens and promote inter-group and inter-racial harmony and good will.⁴

The Ordinance established a commission of fifteen members appointed by the Mayor with the approval of the City Commission (Sec. II); the members should be "as nearly as possible" representative of "management and labor, of the Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish religions, of white and colored races, and other segments of the population. . . ." Members served for a three year term without compensation except reimbursement of personal expenses incurred in connection with their duties. The following five

²Ibid., pp. 589-590, File No. 1636.

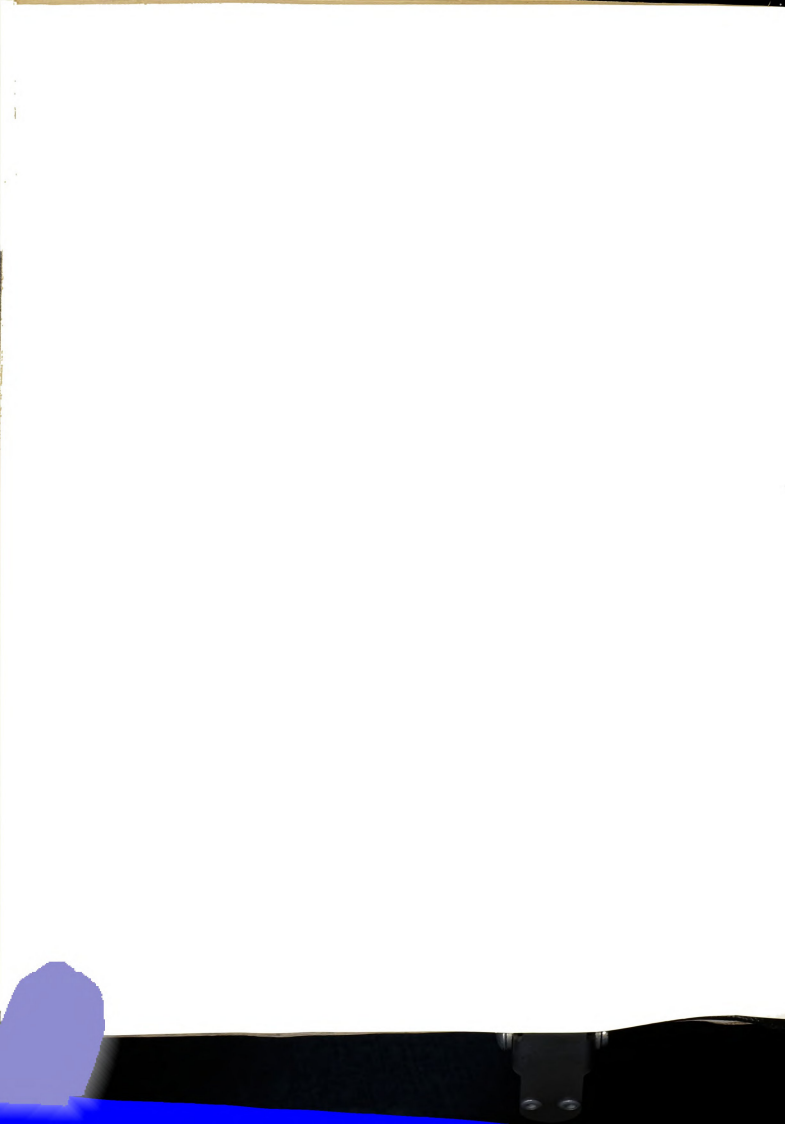
³Ibid., p. 678, File No. 1822.

⁴Ibid., pp. 741-745, File No. 1980.

sections established the duties of the Commission (conforming to the recommendations of the Report of the Study Committee), and placed the Executive and Assistant Executive Directors under the jurisdiction of the Civil Service Board. Finally, the Ordinance made unlawful all discriminatory practices of employment by city officials and required that all contracting agencies of the city which had four or more employees, "shall include in all contracts hereafter negotiated or re-negotiated" a provision on the part of the contractor "not to discriminate against any qualified employee or qualified applicant. . . ."

The adoption of an ordinance establishing a Human Relations Commission as early as 1955 was definitely the work of a very small but determined group of influential citizens. The general population of the city was not aware of the problems facing the Black population and there had not been any acute racial confrontation. The riot syndrome which followed World War I and existed during World War II in many northern urban cities, such as Detroit, Chicago, Philadelphia, or New York, was unknown in Grand Rapids. Black and white students attended the same schools, especially at the secondary level, without visible racial conflict. In school athletic contests members of both races played on the same team against other integrated school teams without incidents. Seating in public transportation or in theaters was segregated only on an individually voluntary basis.

Obviously, the low percentage of Negroes to the total population was responsible in part for the lack of interracial



conflict as was the concentration of Black housing in one small area of the city. This section might have been considered "blighted" according to local standards but it in no way approached the "slum" conditions existent in New York, Chicago, or Detroit. There was obvious discrimination in the field of employment opportunities but most Blacks could find some type of work. Discrimination in education flowed from housing patterns and the "neighborhood school" concept rather than conscious racial prejudice. It was, therefore, somewhat remarkable that the City of Grand Rapids would recognize, not so much the problems existing at the time, but the patterns of discrimination which might lead to future civic disorders. The true purpose of the Human Relations Commission was to prevent as much as possible the growth and expansion of discrimination.

The fifteen members of the commission, appointed by Mayor George Veldman, were sworn into office by the city clerk on June 2, 1955. Mr. Harry J. Kelly, designated as Commission Chairman by the Mayor, opened the first meeting immediately. The Mayor commended the new commissioners who had agreed to serve without compensation and then expressed his personal regrets that such a commission was necessary to assist people of the community to live together in peace.⁵ Mr. Samuel H. Himelstein, a commission member and former city attorney, explained the major duties and obligations contained in the enabling ordinance. Mr. Kelly appointed members to three sub-committees:

⁵Grand Rapids Human Relations Commission, "Off. Min.," June 2, 1955.

1. Policy and Procedure Committee to recommend standard rules for the Commission.
2. Personnel Committee to assist the City Civil Service Commission select an Executive Director.
3. Budget Committee to establish fiscal needs for the current year.

The Commission agreed to take no action on the acquisition of an Assistant Executive Director until the Director was hired and could have some voice in the selection of his full time assistant.⁶

The selection of an Executive Director proved to be more difficult than had been anticipated. The position fell under Civil Service rules and regulations, with the actual appointment to be made by the City Manager. There were no "job specifications" or guidelines to be required of applicants. A NAIRO (National Association of Intergroup Relations Officials) report recommended that applicants for the position have previous experience in working with official agencies, mayors and city councils, civil service boards, and municipal department heads. Secondly, NAIRO recommended the applicants have a sound academic background so as to be able to appreciate adequately the principles and scope of the position. Included in the concept of adequate background was a college degree in one of the social science disciplines and at least three years of successful, paid experience in the field of intergroup relations. Candidates should possess genuine maturity of personality, demonstrated ability to work with people tactfully,

⁶Ibid.

and experience in the collection, analysis and interpretation of social and economic data along with the ability to speak and write effectively.⁷

Mr. Frank J. Schulte, Chief Personnel Examiner of the Civil Service Board, outlined the city's Civil Service Employment procedure and recommended the evaluation of the training and experience of the candidates prior to oral interviews. He requested the assistance of the Personnel Committee in establishing the formal job specifications. This was done and within a month six applicants had filed for the new position. Since none of the original applicants appeared to be outstanding, Mr. Paul Moore, Chairman of the Personnel Committee recommended postponing the appointment at this time. Mr. Moore informed the Commission that because of the permanent nature of Civil Service employment, haste in filling the position might result in long range disaster were an unqualified person appointed. The Commission agreed and directed the Personnel Committee to proceed with caution.⁸

Several members of the commission felt that the mandatory six months probational period of Civil Service regulations was not adequate time for complete evaluation of the individual appointee's ability or achievements. The City Attorney ruled that this period was mandatory by City Charter and the time element could not be extended. Moreover, he pointed out that an employee

⁷George Schermer, "Specifications for the Job of Executive Director," "Off. Min.," July 6, 1955 (Inclosure No. 2).

⁸Ibid., July 6, 1955.



permanently certified could be dismissed only if formal charges of incompetency were filed. The charges would have to be capable of being substantiated in court.⁹

Twenty-one applicants filed for the position prior to September, 1955, twelve of whom merited further consideration. Subsequently, Mr. Moore visited the four candidates considered to be "excellent" prospects and invited them to visit Grand Rapids for oral interview by all members of the Commission. Ultimately the Commission accepted the recommendation of the Personnel Committee to hire Mr. David J. McNamara for the position of Executive Director of the Human Relations Commission, with effective date of employment established as of January 1, 1956. Mr. McNamara was currently serving as the Director of the Civil Rights Department of the Chicago Human Relations Commission.¹⁰

⁹Ibid., Sept. 14, 1955.

¹⁰Ibid., Nov. 2; Dec. 14, 1955.

CHAPTER III

OPTIMISTIC BEGINNINGS, 1956

Prior to the arrival of Mr. McNamara in January, 1956, the Commission attempted to determine just what the enabling ordinance permitted it to do, or not to do. Lacking professional direction, the Commission drew heavily from outside sources, especially the publication of the American Council of Race Relations which identified several positive activities falling within the purview for present work of an official agency. The most important of these activities was to determine whether the city government itself was guilty of discrimination in its hiring and promotional practices, and, if necessary, recommend specific remedial legislation. Secondly, an official agency should assist in the development of intergroup training programs so as to improve relations and equalize opportunities of all citizens and groups.¹

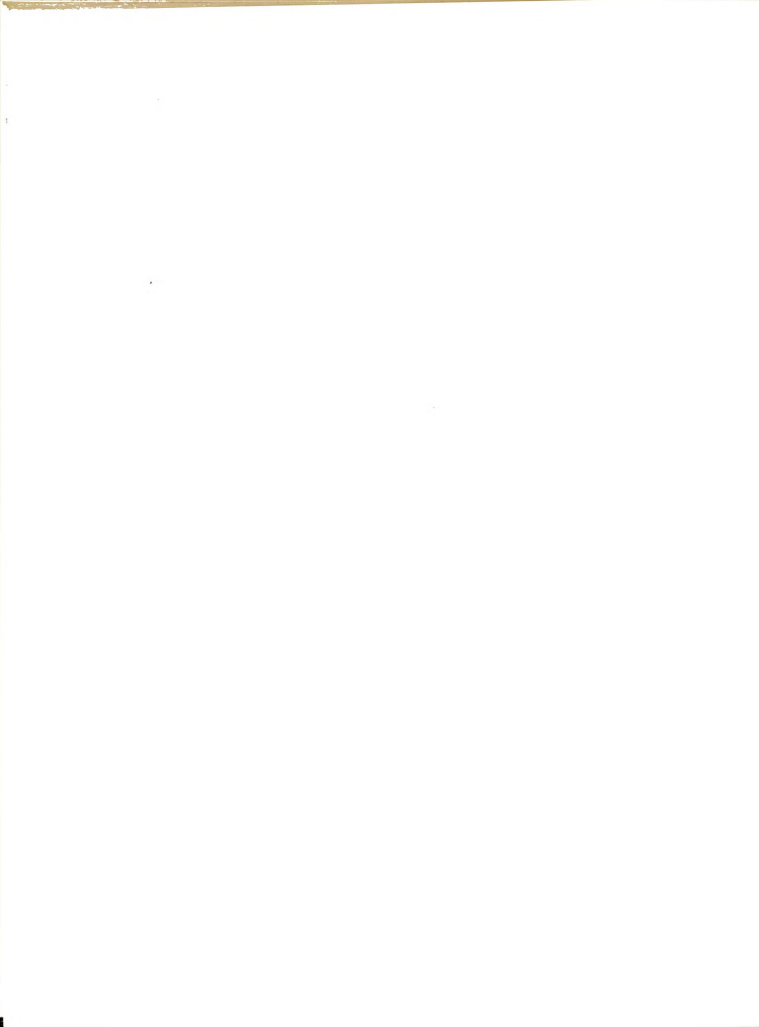
This report stated that official agencies should not attempt to replace articulate forces in the community which publicly pressed for action; nor should it take the lead in protest movements or organize the community or any segment thereof, for direct

¹Robert C. Weaver, "Manual for Official Committee: What Your Official Intergroup Relations Agency Can Do," American Council on Race Relations, 1945, Doc. File No. 25.

action. These action agencies, such as the NAACP and the Urban League, already existed and had well established programs related to both the local and the national levels. The leadership of these groups were well aware of the existing problems and were prepared to take action and exert pressure when they considered the time propitious for positive results. The Commission, itself a municipal agency, should attempt to secure cooperation between other municipal agencies and not pit one against the other. The Commission should attempt to force other branches of government to take specific action, but take no credit for any programs it might inspire. In short, a Commission should never draw attention to itself and, in all matters dealing with the public, the Commission should yield the Leadership to existing private agencies and citizens' committees.²

Following these recommendations, the Commission established four permanent sub-committees for Employment, Housing, Education, and Civil Rights. The Commission charged the Employment Committee to eliminate questions regarding race and nationality from all forms of the Civil Service Department, and the inclusion of non-discriminatory clauses in all city contracts. The committee must of necessity establish close liaison with the Michigan Fair Employment Practice Commission of which, fortunately, Mr. Kell was a member. The Employment Committee was directed to survey local employment situations and arrange meetings with employer

²Ibid., pp. 2-3.



and unions to promote non-discriminatory hiring and improve the vocational training program for minority persons.³

The Housing Committee had a three-fold objective. It should secure data from the annual school census report on local population and housing; in conjunction with one of the State Universities, it should prepare a detailed report on the influence of non-white residence upon property values; and it should work closely with the Grand Rapids Real Estate Board, local realtors, builders, and lending institutions to assist in the establishment and development of programs designed to improve the general housing conditions of minorities.⁴

The first task of the Education Committee was to attempt to gain the confidence of school officials, both public and non-public, on the entire spectrum of human relations within the schools. At the same time, work should be begun relative to school "de facto segregation," a term considered obnoxious to school administrators. This area was extremely delicate since it involved the professional educator on one hand and the "arm-chair sociologist" of the Human Relations Commission on the other. The educators tended to be very suspicious of the Commission in the entire field of education. Fortunately, two members of the commission were college instructors who could make the initial

³"Activities of the Human Relations Commission," Doc. File
No. 17.

⁴Ibid.

contacts with school administrators without being automatically suspect.⁵

The Education Committee was further directed to establish a reference library on the overall subject of human relations for use by the staff and the commissioners and to be made available to students and the general public. Actually Mr. McNamara began this task and by June 12, 1956, he had collected sufficient literature on the subject to justify the publication of a five page bibliography of available material. The literature covered a wide scope of subjects relative to intergroup activities and general information on matters pertaining to race and minorities. Unfortunately, lack of staff and office personnel prevented the regular up-dating of the bibliography although a great mass of material was collected. By 1966 the "Staff Library" was totally useless, clogged with unintentional duplication, old and outdated material, and without any organization. The "library" was so confused that the staff referred students and other interested people to the Public Library for information rather than waste time trying to locate requested material.

The Education Committee was charged with the development of an in-service training program both for the police and school officials on minority problems, and to form a speakers bureau and a community-wide educational program.

⁵Ibid.

The Civil Rights Committee had the responsibility of investigating all complaints brought to the staff. It was not known at the time to what extent the State Fair Employment Practice Commission preempted, or totally replaced, the authority of the local agency in the legal area. Therefore the committee was directed to coordinate all its activities with the FEPC. The committee was directed to prepare a pamphlet containing all the local and State Civil Rights laws and regulations as a preliminary step towards the delineation of powers and perogatives of both state and local agencies.⁶

The implementation of the objectives of all the committees did not begin until Mr. McNamara arrived in January, 1956. The new Executive Director spent the first few months in personal orientation, getting familiar with the city, the government and its officials, and making as many personal contacts as possible both in and out of the City Hall. He accepted numerous speaking engagements to explain the role of the Human Relations Commission and its objectives. He obtained several short films on various intergroup relations problems which were made available on a no-cost basis to any group which desired to show them to their membership. Ultimately a dozen of more such films were on file and available for general use. However, staff records indicate that the films were seldom used except by staff personnel. Budgetary problems of the city prevented him from obtaining the assistant director authorized in the enabling ordinance.

⁶Weaver, "Manual for Official Committee," Doc. File No. 25.

Mr. McNamara began work with the sub-committees in April, 1956. Over five hundred people, including the Mayor, City Manager, several City Commissioners and representatives of Church and minority groups attended the formal reception of Mr. McNamara held at the Art Gallery on January 17, 1956. This was the first public activity of the Human Relations Commission, its Executive Director and staff.⁷ The Commission invited selected, interested and qualified people of the community to join in the committee work. Several years later the Mayor and City Commission would take exception to this practice, but at this time they voiced no objection.

The Employment Committee produced the first positive results. Employers, conscious of the obligations of the newly created State Fair Employment Practice Commission, realized the Human Relations Commission was concerned with similar matters. Mr. McNamara and Mr. Joseph Van Dyke of the Commission (and of the U.A.W.) were invited to participate in a local civil rights conference of the United Automobile Workers on January 20-22, 1956.⁸ On March 10, 1956, Mr. McNamara and three members of the Commission attended the first State Conference of Human Relations Agencies at Ann Arbor to exchange information and ideas with the personnel of six other Michigan cities. At this conference

⁷"Off. Min.," November 21, December 14, 1956.

⁸Ibid., April 11, 1956.

particular stress was placed on the need for cooperation between the local Commissions and the FEPC.⁹

Mayor Veldman, at the request of the Commission, proclaimed the Week of April 15-21, 1956, as "Equal Job Opportunity Week." The local television station, WOOD, and the Kalamazoo station, WKZO, showed several spot announcements daily on fair employment practices, thereby giving wide coverage to the work of the Commission and to its concept of Fair Employment. The publicity was excellent but the Commission received no indication of any positive results.¹⁰

A major step in the area of employment was the establishment of a local Employment Advisor Committee on May 3, 1956. Mr. John Field, Executive Director of the Michigan FEPC, had suggested the creation of this committee composed of representatives of industry, commerce, labor, schools, churches, and community organizations. Mr. Field supplied two staff members to assist the group and Mr. Paul Moore, Chairman of the Employment Committee, represented the Commission.¹¹ Mr. Robert Greene and Mr. Jerry Coomes of the State FEPC prepared a general report on the local employment picture for the first meeting of the group, July 16, 1956. A final report, "A Survey of Employment, Training,

⁹Ibid., March 14, 1956.

¹⁰Ibid., May 25, 1956.

¹¹Ibid., June 13, July 24, 1956.

and Placement Patterns in Grand Rapids," was completed in November, 1956 and received lengthy coverage in the local press.¹²

The report cited "a serious shortage of skilled tradesmen, especially in the woodworking industry" which was a major industry in the city. In spite of this obvious shortage, no program whatsoever existed for apprentice training of minority people. Moreover, only two Negro youngsters had been selected for such training over the past twenty years, one of whom was refused employment "for reason of race by the employees of the shop where he would have worked."¹³

Automotive manufacturing trades, as well as other industries, hired Negroes for "unskilled jobs on the assembly and maintenance, but not in skilled trades" and "no Negroes (were) known to be in the construction industry other than as laborers." The City hired "10 Negro clericals, 11 policemen and one fireman. Another 40 to 50 worked in various service jobs." In a city with an estimated Negro population of ten thousand, only forty Negroes graduated from high school in June, 1956.¹⁴

The Employment Advisory Committee decided to arrange an employment conference with employers as soon as possible. Mr. Greene wrote Mr. Kelly that "Grand Rapids seems (to be) a community with entrenched attitudes and is markedly different to traditions

¹²Grand Rapids Press, Nov. 9, Nov. 13, 1956.

¹³Robert Greene and Jerry Coomes, "Employment and Training Survey--Grand Rapids," Sept., 1956, HRC Files: "FEPC."

¹⁴Ibid.



and established ways of doing things."¹⁵ He indicated belief that there was a sufficient diversity in the community, along with social and economic security, "to create a willingness to listen and to reflect and reexamine." Mr. Greene suggested a small group of individuals be invited to a conference on "Preparation for Merit Employment" in order to establish the philosophy and approach of the Commission in the minds of the employers with a maximum amount of inter-exchange of ideas.

The conference was held in October, 1956 and included only members conversant with business, industry, school, or organization. Mr. Kelly's keynote address stressed the community needs as compared with existing resources; this was followed by a panel discussion and then small group discussions. The participants were generally impressed and requested a second conference to be held on June 14, 1957 to discuss "The Role of the Trade Union in Equal Employment Opportunity" and a third meeting be scheduled for October, 1957 on the subject "Opportunities for Training and Employment in the Grand Rapids Area."¹⁶

Fifty people, chiefly representatives of labor unions, attended the June conference and discussed in depth the desirability of hiring a greater number of minority persons and the need to establish a pre-work training program for high school drop-outs.

¹⁵Robert Greene to Harry Kelly, letter, Feb. 18, 1957, HRC Files: "FEPC."

¹⁶Employment Advisory Council, Minutes, May 28, 1957, "Off. Files": FEPC.

In addition, Mr. Greene explained in detail the new state regulations relative to discrimination insofar as the legislation was concerned with upgrading and promotions within the unions.¹⁷

Mr. McNamara announced his resignation, effective January 1, 1958, before any program planning had been done for the conference scheduled for September. In fact, the Employment Committee was inactive for nearly two years after Sept. 1, 1957, except for receiving and filing reports from the local FEPC office and referring to it by staff personnel of statements taken from individuals alleging discrimination in hiring or promotion.

The Employment Committee had begun to work toward equal employment of all workers several months prior to the arrival of Mr. McNamara. The enthusiasm which the committee evidenced promised positive and rapid results. Unfortunately, the actual achievements were meager since the committee lacked effective and professional leadership. Moreover, the staff of the local office of the State FEPC, opened in 1955, was far more experienced and knowledgeable in the area of equal employment and could expend more working hours on the problem. The HRC Employment Committee passed into a state of limbo, existing chiefly in name only for several years to come. A similar pattern of inactivity developed in other committees of the Commission whenever it lacked an executive director. The Committees generally failed to develop internal leadership. In fact, the total committee structure became a tool which the

¹⁷"Off. Min.," June 19, 1957.



Executive Director could use to put his plans and programs into effect. A strong director could control the Commission rather than be controlled by it.

The Legal and Civil Rights Committee

The first task the Legal and Civil Rights Committee faced was the objections of the City Attorney, Mr. George R. Cook, to the wording of the enabling ordinance which established the Human Relations Commission. Mr. Cook stated that the introduction was "unnecessarily long and vague . . . verbose and somewhat pompous" with "overblown references to Democracy, the cornerstone of our American Traditions." He believed the phrase which limited membership to "those who had manifested and demonstrated their interests in human relations" would prevent excellent potential candidates from contributing their personal knowledge and skills to the Commission. Mr. Cook pointed out that the Commission's power to "prevent discriminatory practices" removed it from a purely advisory capacity but the enabling ordinance failed to grant the Commission "cease and desist" authority required for prevention. He argued further that the ordinance created an administration anomaly insofar as the Executive Director, not the Commission, prepared the budget; that the Civil Service Board, not the Commission, selected the Executive Director but the Commission established the Employment (salary) range. Finally, Mr. Cook observed that the local ordinance defined the word "employer" as any person employing four or more employees whereas the State FEPC defined an employer as one hiring

eight or more persons. In spite of all these objections, neither the committee nor the Commission took any action on the issue and only a few of Mr. Cook's objections were remedied in the revision of the ordinance in 1963.¹⁸

The main purpose of the Legal and Civil Rights Committee was to visit individuals claiming to be victims of discrimination as defined in the ordinance. However, the State Fair Employment Practice Act appeared to preempt this power and negate the jurisdiction of local and municipal agencies. Serious confusion as to jurisdiction existed between state and local agencies as well as proper procedure to be followed. Consequently, the committee requested and received authorization from the Commission to prepare a pamphlet for public distribution listing both state and city civil rights legislation.¹⁹ The City Attorney reviewed and approved the final document prior to the publication of 2,500 copies.²⁰

This twenty-one page pamphlet, "Your Civil Rights" identified three sections of the State Constitution, and six Michigan laws and municipal legislation dealing with discrimination based on color, race, creed, national origin, or ancestry. The pamphlet

¹⁸Mr. George R. Cook, City Attorney, to Mr. Harry J. Kelly, Chairman, Human Relations Commission, Aug. 6, 1956, Doc. File No. 77; See also: Legal & Civil Rights Committee, "Minutes," Sept. 28, 1956.

¹⁹Legal & Civil Rights Committee, "Minutes," June 22, 1956; See also: "Off. Min.," Sept. 28, 1956.

²⁰Mr. David McNamara to Mr. Cook, Letter Memorandum, January 21, 1957, contained in Doc. File No. 78.

explained what procedure a person claiming discrimination should follow from the initial step involving attempt at amicable settlement to the final appeal to the Supreme Court of the State. The pamphlet concluded with specific instruction as to how complaints should be reported to insure appropriate action.²¹

In actual practice, the Commission staff personnel merely received and forwarded all complaints to the local State FEPC office which had original jurisdiction and which could most effectively expedite the investigation of an alleged violation.

One major allegation of racial discrimination involved the right of a local dentist to refuse to treat a Negro patient on the grounds that such service would have an adverse effect on the members of his other (i.e., white) patients. No conciliation was possible and the state and local dental professional societies refused to take any action claiming this specific situation fell within the range of "non-public domain," which automatically excluded dental and medical practices from the provisions of the Statutes. The Legal & Civil Rights Committee requested State Attorney General, Thomas M. Kavanagh, to give an opinion as to whether professional offices or services, such as those involving physicians, dentists, lawyers, or real estate agents were considered to be "places of public accommodations" within the meaning of, and subject to the terms of, the civil rights statute.²²

²¹Grand Rapids Human Relations Commission, "Your Civil Rights," June, 1957, Doc. File No. 78.

²²Letter, Grand Rapids Human Relations Commission to Honorable Thomas M. Kavanagh, Attorney General, State of Michigan, April 18, 1957; See also: Legal & Civil Rights Committee, "Minutes," April 18, 1957.

The Attorney General declined to give an opinion since the request did not originate from a member of the legislature, a state official, or prosecuting attorney. The Committee asked the Kent County prosecutor to request an opinion but he declined stating that he believed the situation fell under the concept of "non-public domain." The Committee decided not to pursue the question further and recommended that the Education Committee initiate an educational orientation program for dental and medical societies. It must be concluded, therefore, that the Commission lost this battle because of a general reluctance on the part of the members to engage in direct conflict with the medical profession, or any of its branches.²³

There was continual progress in the elimination of discrimination against minority persons in all other areas of medical services except dentistry. Hospitals gradually ended discrimination of bed assignments of patients and all levels of nursing education admitted more minority students. However, it would be a completely gratuitous assumption to credit these advancements directly to the work of the Human Relations Commission.

²³"Off. Min.," May 8, 1957.

CHAPTER IV

MINORITY PROBLEMS IN THE SCHOOLS

The Education Committee undertook first the development of an information library concerning human relations. Within a year the committee and staff had collected a considerable mass of information, articles, pamphlets, and documents supplied by many branches of the Federal Government and the Anti-Defamation League of the B'nai B'rith. Mr. McNamara's six page bibliography included materials on minority and Negro housing, neighborhood stabilization programs, and technical matters dealing with race, financing, and property values.¹ For the next decade additional materials were added but never properly catalogued. By 1967 there were several large cartons of miscellaneous documents and articles available but the complete and total lack of order or selection made these sources next to useless. Not even the commission members had read them.²

Mr. McNamara also began a collection of film strips on intergroup relations for staff and general use. Close liaison

¹Human Relations Commission, "Literature on Race and Housing," June 12, 1956, Doc. File No. 25.

²Note: Between Sept. 1, 1967 and June 1, 1968, all the materials in the Commission's library were examined, useless or out of date material discarded, and the remainder placed in the permanent files of the Commission.

with the Public Library prevented unnecessary duplication and the office staff kept an active file on films available, a description of content matter, and prior usage over a ten year period. The films were shown to school classes, P.T.A. groups, service clubs, and to any organization which wanted or needed a program. Frequently a staff or commission member would be present to comment on the film or the HRC.³

The Director, and a few of the Commissioners, spoke to various groups two or three times a week on the general subject of human relations. This civic indoctrination, although very time consuming, was a prerequisite for the ultimate success of the Commission.

The Education Committee began its work of personnel orientation with other city departments in the Police Department. Reports from other cities clearly indicated growing interracial tensions between minority groups and law enforcement agencies since the end of World War II. Human Relations Commissions in St. Paul, Minneapolis, Youngstown, and Dayton had utilized with fair success an in-service training manual prepared by the American Council on Race Relations. This manual noted that all police should be familiar with the anti-discriminatory laws of federal, state and local governments; they should understand the minority composition of their particular community and the history of its development;

³All the film records and files were current as of June 1, 1968, and housed in the "Off. Files": Film File.

they must understand the nature of prejudice and the danger of stereotype concepts. The Council recommended that the initial training program should include the ranking officers of the department and representatives of minority groups.⁴

This same report included a reprint of a talk given by Mr. George Schermer, Director of the Mayor's Inter-Racial Committee in Detroit, on the subject of "Police Functions in Intergroup Relations," originally presented at the Police Seminar at the University of Chicago. Mr. Schermer claimed that the origin of Human Relations Commissions began after the race riots in several northern cities in 1942 and 1943. Detroit, Chicago, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, St. Louis, St. Paul, and Los Angeles had all established commissions by the end of 1944. Dozens of additional commissions were established yearly, most of them having only the vaguest concept of their task. The formation of NAIRO (National Association of Intergroup Relations Officials) in Detroit, 1947, assisted commissions throughout the country to make the general public aware of the economic and social evils of race discrimination. NAIRO publications observed that police departments in general were suspicious of interracial commissions, composed chiefly of "do-gooders," who would themselves create new and serious problems of law enforcement. The police resented outside interference and maintained that law and order could be

⁴ Joseph T. Kluchesky and A. A. Liverright, "Police and Minority Groups," American Council on Race Relations, Dec., 1946, Doc. File No. 43.

kept only when minority groups were "kept in their place." The rapid post-war movement of Blacks and Whites from the South to the industrial centers of the North and West accentuated and aggravated the problem of law enforcement.⁵

Mr. Schermer contended that negative prevention ("keep the city out of trouble; don't let a race riot develop"), was not sufficient; only the elimination of segregation and discrimination could prevent trouble and law enforcement agencies had to take the lead. When public policy dictated the existence of segregation, as in the South, or dictated the individual's freedom and rights, the police must enforce the law. Police must not establish public policy although they might at times operate with a "public be damned" attitude. The police themselves were a minority group, identified by uniform and badge. Expected by the public to be paragons of virtue and ability, the same public stereotyped the policeman as "a crook and a dumb flatfoot." Minority groups identified the police with oppression and brutality and subservient to white authority; White America charged that the police favored (or feared!) the Negroes and gave them more protection than proper. Often the "whipping boy" of politicians and the press, the police officer without a sense of humor, or a fanatical devotion to his job, was in danger of becoming paranoid. A Human Relations Commission must give the police every available

⁵Mr. George Schermer, "Police Functions in Inter-Group Relations," Doc. File No. 43.

type of assistance and encouragement to develop greater professionalism.⁶

The Grand Rapids Police Department quickly availed itself of Mr. McNamara's professional training. Captain Faber invited him to address the new police recruit class in the first week of February, 1958, thereby initiating a procedure which continues to the present.⁷ Subsequently Mr. McNamara was included in the annual in-service training programs. In June, 1957, Mr. McNamara and Lt. Edward Lapp attended the Institute on Police Community Relations held at Michigan State University, June 2-7. The Commission paid the expenses of Mr. McNamara and Lt. Lapp while the Police Department sent Lt. Stanley Skuzinski from their own budget.⁸

This Institute, modeled on an earlier course conducted by Joseph D. Lohman, Professor of Sociology, University of Chicago for the Chicago Park District Police, emphasized the effects on the Federal Supreme Court's decision on school desegregation. The National Conference of Christians and Jews, in conjunction with the officials of the School of Police Administration, Michigan State University, sponsored the five day session held at the Kellogg Center for Continuing Education. During the institute the subjects covered included the nature of prejudice, psychological factors in community relations, sociological dimensions of population

⁶Ibid.

⁷"Off. Min.," Feb. 8, 1956.

⁸Ibid., June 19, 1957.

trends, racially changing neighborhoods, minority group concepts, racial factors in law enforcement, and professional development.⁹

The Institute produced immediate, as well as long range, results. Lt. Stanley Skuzinski, Director of the Juvenile Division of the Police Department, met with six ministers from churches whose membership was largely Negro. Operating on the assumption that the joint efforts of police and ministers would be far more effective than mere threat of police, they initiated a program whereby juveniles could be sent to the ministers for counseling whenever desirable. The ministers were eager to assist but the program was discontinued within a year after less than spectacular success. The ministers were inadequately trained in sociological counseling and the youth came to them only because of police pressure and not because of any real desire for help. The Human Relations Commission, ministers and police agreed to discontinue the program. However, the Commission recognized the value of including clergy on the Commission; henceforth, the Commission always had at least two members of the clergy.¹⁰

A study completed in September, 1957, attempted to ascertain if there existed any significant difference in the attitudes of white and non-white junior high school students toward the police. The students answered prepared questions read orally in order to

⁹Louis A. Radelet, "Police and Community Relations," Social Order (New York: National Jesuit Social Science Center, 1960). Mr. Radelet was the National Director, Program Development for Special Community Services, NCCJ.

¹⁰"Off. Min.," Oct. 9, 1957.

eliminate differences in reading ability. Since honesty of student response depended on lack of personal identification, the students did not sign the questionnaires but papers of Negro students were marked with the letter "C" (Colored?) for subsequent racial identification. One question on how long the student had lived in the city was asked to determine if there was any difference in the recent Black migrant student from the South.

The study indicated that while all students had some negative attitudes towards police, the Negro student was definitely more antagonistic than the white ones. Eighty percent of the Whites believed the police treatment was fair whereas only 20% of the Blacks agreed. Whites appeared more likely to cooperate with the police than the Negroes and that the degree of potential cooperation between the students and the police increased in direct proportion to the seriousness of the crime. There was no noticeable difference on the question of murder.¹¹

All Commissioners and officials of the Police Department received copies of the final report but it produced little effect on the handling of juveniles or on the police recruitment policies. On the contrary, youth distrust of the police generally became greater with the passage of time and constituted one of the major causes of the unrest which broke out in the summer of 1967. Both the Commission and the Police Department failed to take adequate

¹¹Peter Feddema, "Negro and White Student Attitudes Towards Police," June, 1957, Doc. File No. 51.

advantage of the opportunity to correct an obviously potential source of trouble.

Not all youth-police relations produced negative results. One of the more interesting, and successful, episodes concerned a near riot condition in John Ball Park between two groups of girls between the ages of ten and twelve: a white group from Creston Christian School and a Black group from Madison Park Public School. Each group was on a school picnic and eating lunch in the park pavillion. Policewoman Mary Horton, Juvenile and Women's Division, reported that trouble began suddenly with the taunt of "nigger" on one side and "some bad remarks which were made in reference to my mother" on the other. Physical attacks followed the verbal exchange during which girls of both schools were "struck, scratched, and had their hair pulled." The students claimed that "an older woman" broke up the fight, but not before the police had been notified. The following Saturday, at the request of the Police, the girls and their parents assembled in the Central YWCA to see a film from the Commission's library illustrating the dangers of "name-calling." Afterwards Miss Horton held an open discussion period during which it was clearly obvious that the white children were not aware that the Negro students resented the word "nigger." More important, the white children knew of no other word since the parents consistently classified all Blacks as "niggers" in the home and it had become an accepted part of the children's vocabulary. After ice cream and soft drinks, friendship was established.

Subsequently, the authorities of the two schools arranged a series of exchange programs and the episode ended on a positive note.¹²

Whereas the Police Department made use of the services of the Commission from the start, the Board of Education had a definite attitude of distrust of the amateur educator or sociologist. The majority of the commission members advocated making a direct, frontal attack on the Board of Education for real or supposed practices of discrimination. The two local college instructors recommended a position of gradualism in dealing with the schools. Ultimately they persuaded the total commission it could not even hope to compete with the Board of Education, if for no other reason than the respective size of budget.

As a result the Education Committee addressed itself first to the non-white "drop-out" problem. School census records showed that between 1950 and 1956 the total school population had increased by approximately six thousand students, or 28%. The white student increase was only 22% as opposed to the non-white increase of 116%. At the same time the holding power of the schools decreased 25% in terms of number of Negro graduates recorded.¹³

The Education Committee met with Dr. Morton J. Sobel, Michigan Regional Director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith in July, 1956 to develop a specific program directed

¹²Sgt. Mary Horton, "Police Report--John Ball Episode," "Off. Files": Police Actions.

¹³Mrs. Hillary Bissell, "Enrollment of Grand Rapids Public Schools," 1956, HRC "Off. Files": "School Statistics."

to the "drop-out" problem. Dr. Sobel recommended a full day teacher-institute, with three to five members from each school attending. Dr. Benjamin Buikema, Superintendent of Public Schools, co-sponsored the institute which would stress the indifference of parents to the value of education for children and the lack of effective minority leadership in the encouragement of "schoolmindedness."¹⁴ Dr. Buikema assigned three or four teachers from a selected list of schools to attend. No teachers from private or parochial schools were involved on the assumption that they would take part in later conferences. However, institutes for non-public school teachers never materialized in spite of the fact that approximately 40% of all students in the city attended these schools.

The institute was held at the Rowe Hotel on Nov. 20, 1956, and it was not an unqualified success. A follow-up questionnaire on the effectiveness of the institute indicated that 80% of the teachers felt the conference was good "in general" and requested additional institutes on the subject. There was near total agreement in condemnation of the excessive aggressiveness of the resource persons and a general complaint of a lack of sufficient time for discussion.¹⁵

¹⁴Grand Rapids Human Relations Commission, "Education Committee Minutes," July 23 & Aug. 23, 1956. (Hereinafter referred to as "Ed. Min.").

¹⁵"Off. Min.," Nov. 14, 1956. (Program of Institute attached to the Minutes.) See also: "Off. Min.," Dec. 12, 1956.

Shortly after the first teacher institute, Dr. Buikema informed the Commission that there was a significant increase in the total numbers of non-white pupils but an even more significant increase in the numbers of non-white pupil drop-outs. He stated that slightly more than half of all the non-white students left school during the ninth or tenth grades. Mr. Kelly denied that improved employment opportunities for Negroes had any relationship with increased pupil drop-out or that any position filled through official agencies involved drop-out students.

Dr. Buikema's statistics caused the Education Committee to initiate two action programs immediately. Personal interviews were held with each student of the eighth and ninth grades, and their parents, in order to impress upon them the need for, and the economic value of, completing the total high school program. Secondly, the Committee obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau statistics of the potential average lifetime income of an individual according to the number of school years completed. These statistics were printed on ten thousand wallet size cards and on the reverse side of the card was printed a list of positions in industry, business, medical, and government in which there was an obvious demand for trained personnel. These cards were distributed to



all high school students in the city to motivate them to remain in school.¹⁶

The Commission organized a group of Negro doctors, lawyers, and teachers who volunteered to interview the 127 non-white students enrolled in the eighth and ninth grades of the public schools. The Commission believed successful Negro citizens would have greater impact on the students and their parents than would visitations by their white counterparts. All interviews were completed by March, 1957; evaluation of results could only be made in years to come. No attempt was made as of 1973 to make such a study. The only immediate result was to acquaint the Negro Community that the Commission was truly concerned with the drop-out problem.¹⁷

Mrs. Sadie Silverstein, Principal of the Franklin and Maplewood Schools located in an area composed almost totally of non-white population, invited the Education Committee members to meet with her and the teaching staff of these schools on March 8, 1957. At this meeting the committee learned that the drop-out

¹⁶"Off. Min.," Feb. 21, 1957.

<u>Years of School Completed</u>	<u>Lifetime Income</u>
None	\$ 58,000.
Elementary	
1 to 4 years	72,000.
5 to 7 years	93,000.
8 years with diploma	116,000.
High School	
1 to 3 years	135,000.
4 years with diploma	165,000.
College	
1 to 3 years	190,000.
4 years with degree	268,000.

¹⁷"Off. Min.," Feb. 21, 1957; March 13, 1957.

problem of this area was complicated severely by the emotional behavior problems of the pupils whose parents lacked interest in education, especially those parents who had recently migrated from the deep South. Mrs. Silverstein stated that her most serious problem was the lack of continuity of teachers in the inner-city schools since most of the teachers requested transfer to better areas after the first year of teaching. She suggested granting economic or other incentives to encourage teachers to remain in these core schools. Such incentives were forth-coming six years later with grants from the Federal Government but the HRC had no part in obtaining these funds.

She also requested help in establishing an adult literacy class. Dr. Buikema approved of the concept but stated the current budget made assignment of a regular teacher impossible. However, he did authorize keeping the school open three nights a week for the adult education program. The Council of Social Agencies of the Ambassadors Club obtained qualified volunteer teachers. The first formal classes began in January, 1958, with over twenty-five adults registered for the twenty week course. The Human Relations Commission allocated one hundred dollars for materials and supplies needed.¹⁸

The question of teacher assignment of Black teachers to the inner city schools had not been settled. Mrs. Silverstein

¹⁸Ibid., March 13, Oct. 9, 1957; See also: "Ed. Min.," July 2, 1957.

had stated that attitudes and social conditions of students in these schools placed additional work loads on the teachers. Seven of the twenty-two teachers at the Franklin school were Negroes, rated as outstanding, but the students in general resented forced education. It was not possible to make any consistent contact with the parents because so many of the mothers worked and were themselves the products of inferior education and not really interested in their children's education.¹⁹

Dr. Wilburforce Plummer, President of the NAACP, had challenged previously the validity of the Board of Education policies on teacher assignment, claiming discriminatory practices insofar as Negro teachers assignments were concerned. School officials denied this charge and stated that an increasing number of Negro teachers were hired each year and assigned, whenever possible, according to the indicated teacher preference. Mrs. Bissell prepared a chart on the employment and assignment of Negro teachers which appeared to support Dr. Plummer's accusation. In spite of the protests of Mrs. Bissell, the Commission took no action except to request her to prepare a second report which would include figures for the current school year, 1957-58.²⁰

The second report, November, 1957, showed that the Board of Education employed a total of thirty-one Negro teachers, including one unassigned, two on leave of absence, and one in

¹⁹"Ed. Min.," March 8, 1957.

²⁰Ibid., Oct. 24, 1957.

special (oral-deaf) education. Nineteen of the Black teachers were assigned to schools having over 65% Negro students enrolled, the other eight assigned to schools on the periphery of the Negro housing area. No Negro teacher taught in schools of all white students.

Mrs. Bissell did not see the increase of Black teachers from one (1948) to thirty-two (1957) as an indication of a positive program in the hiring of non-whites. She believed that the Black teachers indicated a preference for assignment to schools having at least some Negro students because they realized the impossibility of receiving assignments to schools with all white student bodies. Finally, Mrs. Bissell condemned as intellectual bias the concept that Black teachers had better understanding of the personal problems of Negro students and were therefore more effective teaching them.

The "moderates" on the Commission did not wish to challenge the Board of Education even though they agreed that the existing assignment procedures were probably somewhat discriminatory. They contended that the Board of Education was aware of the problem and slowly progressing towards a satisfactory solution which any action on the part of the Commission might curtail. Expanding the co-operative relations between the Commission and the Board was more valuable to the Commission's long range objectives than fighting a lost cause. The failure of the Commission in this matter was

obvious, especially since there was no major change in Board assignment policies of non-white teachers until after 1968.²¹

The teacher assignment controversy brought out in the open the truth that the Neighborhood School concept inevitably resulted in "de facto" segregation. This concept, generally followed in public school systems throughout the nation, dictated that students attend the particular school physically located in the geographic area in which they lived. This policy limited the distance the student had to walk and the total distance travelled. Also, the system grouped in one building students of similar background and environment. As housing patterns developed into a rigid racial division, de facto school segregation followed automatically. The housing area open to non-white residence remained essentially the same in spite of the previously noted heavy immigration of Negroes from the deep South. The schools located within the ghetto area experienced a rapid population growth consisting almost totally of non-white children as seen in an up-dated report of Mrs. Bissell:

<u>School</u>	<u>% Non-white (1946-47)</u>	<u>% Non-white (1958-59)</u>
Franklin	57.05	80.67
Henry	51.85	81.18
Jefferson	.32	28.86
Madison	.64	26.36
Sheldon	16.59	79.74
Vandenberg	10.81	47.18 ²²

²¹Ibid., Nov. 7, Dec. 17, 1957; See also: "Off. Files": Public Schools and "Off. Min.," Dec. 11, 1957, Jan. 16, 1958.

²²Human Relations Commission, "Off. Files": "Schools."

The Board of Education had built no new school in twenty-five years because of the depression and the building restrictions in force during World War II. Post-war plans included the building of one new school within the inner city in a district already split by the construction of the new expressway through the center of the city (U.S. 131). The expressway would force several families to find new residents and reduce the ratio of white students in the proposed new Campau School. The proposed location of the new building would force students to cross daily the main north-south street of the city, Division Avenue.

An independent Citizens Committee had opposed the Construction of the Campau School on the grounds that it would not relieve the crowded conditions in the older schools of the area and would house only Black students, many of whom would be crossing hazardous streets. The group recommended the building of additional classrooms to existing schools (Vandenberg, Jefferson, and Madison) and drastic boundary line changes and open enrollment in all underutilized schools regardless of location.²³

The Board of Education took no action except to request additional information relative to existing and projected elementary school needs of the Campau area. The HRC Education Committee prepared this second report which indicated a population increase of the area from 53,000 in 1949 to 63,000 in 1955 with a corresponding

²³Mrs. Herman L. Coburn, "Report on the Analysis of Block Data in the Campau Area," April, 1953. HRC Official Files: "Schools."

increase of preschool population (ages 0-5) from 16,995 to 20,879. The conversion of single family dwelling units into multiple family units attracted families with younger children. Projecting the figures into 1961, it was obvious that the seven elementary schools in the area were incapable of handling the anticipated student population increase. Two of the schools were classified as "adequate"; three were old with the boiler rooms located directly under the classrooms and lacked space for expansion; the other two schools were inadequate because of age and structure. The play area surrounding all seven schools was severely limited.²⁴

The Commission prepared still another report at the request of the local chapter of the NAACP in March, 1956, which indicated that 13% of all Public School students were Negro and 89% of these attended the core area schools. Estimates placed the non-white enrollment in these schools as of 1960 at 87%. Two contiguous school districts, Franklin and Sheldon, were already over enrolled 56% and 43% respectively. The report contended that the Board of Education had failed to recognize population trends which produced de facto segregation and further that racial segregation in education did "irreparable damage to children" and created unerasable trauma conditions. Students coming from the deep South, when integrated with northern born students of the same age and grade level, depressed

²⁴Mrs. Herman L. Coburn, "Elementary School Facilities, Campau District, December, 1955." HRC Official Files: "Schools."

serious classroom achievement. Classroom norms tended to decline to the lower potential of class average. Finally, the report stated that the increased student-teacher classroom ratio had an adverse effect on quality teaching, resulting in an excessively high drop-out ratio of Black students. Only immediate and drastic changes in the Board of Education policies of enrollment and building could reverse this established pattern. The situation was particularly serious in Grand Rapids where the private and parochial schools syphoned off nearly 40% of the total school enrollment but only 3 1/2% of the non-white student body.²⁵ The Board of Education responded by making a few minor boundary line changes which gave limited and temporary relief to the overcrowding school conditions but effected no permanent solution.²⁶

The citizens of Grand Rapids authorized a special, additional, tax program to raise ten million dollars for school construction and improvement in 1950. Ultimately sixteen new schools were constructed, only two of which were located in the inner city.²⁷ This indicated that the Board of Education had failed to meet squarely the problem of pupil concentration in the core area and the general problem of de facto segregation. The Board still remained officially committed to the traditional and historical concept of the Neighborhood Schools.

²⁵Mrs. Hillary Bissell, "Selected Information on the Negro Problem in Grand Rapids Schools," March 1, 1956, Doc. File No. 98.

²⁶"Off. Files": "Schools," June 3, 1956.

²⁷Grand Rapids Press, Jan. 31, 1956.

When Mr. McNamara resigned, Jan. 1, 1958, the Education Committee could claim some areas of success and others of failure. A significant beginning had been made in the general public indoctrination into intergroup problems. Public speeches, utilization of interracial films and library materials had exposed a number of people to the objectives of the Commission. Much more public education remained to be done. Some progress had been made in the field of police education in intergroup relations. There was no appreciable change in the attitudes of either the general public or the police. The school drop-out problem was brought to public attention but certainly no tangible results were noted. On the contrary, the continued influx of non-whites from the South caused the problem to become more acute and it would continue to harrass the Committee for years to come. The Committee had established excellent rapport with the Board of Education and School administrators. This liaison was the most significant of all achievements since it represented a direct reversal of the attitude of distrust and antagonism which had existed only two years previously. On the other hand, there had been no noticeable improvement in the problems of teacher assignment, de facto segregation, or the inner city building program. However, there was realistic basis for hope since the core of the controversy had been identified as the official commitment of the Board of Education to the Neighborhood School concept. The Commission had failed to propose a viable solution to substitute for this concept other than the temporary palliative of moving a few

school district boundary lines and the recommendations for erection of new buildings at a time when the building budget was nearly exhausted.

Obviously much was yet to be accomplished but at least the tentative "battle line" had been drawn and the outline for future action of the Education Committee clearly determined.

CHAPTER V

NEITHER HOME NOR CASTLE

The Housing Committee was fortunate to have a considerable quantity of documented material relative to the housing problems in the city. As early as 1952 the Urban League had published a detailed report of housing conditions within the ghetto with its clearly defined boundaries. The restrictive covenant real estate laws had created a single square mile ghetto located immediately South and East of the center of the city. The Southern Blacks who had migrated into the city after World War II were forced to settle in this "ugly scar in the center of the city."¹

This report surveyed four ghetto school districts, Henry, Sigsbee, Vandenberg and Madison, for family distribution, types and conditions of dwellings, years of residence, family income, and other pertinent items. This study classified about one-third of the dwelling units as being in good condition, about half the units in fair condition, and the rest poor. Approximately 40% of the families rented their units which averaged 4.7 rooms per family; 60% were buying their homes averaging 5.4 rooms per family. The

¹Edward A. King, Director, Grand Rapids Urban League Brough Community Association, "A Study of Housing in Selected Areas of Grand Rapids," Aug., 1952, Doc. File No. 93.

average length of residence of all home owners in the city was about thirteen years. One third of the ghetto families interviewed desired to purchase homes out of the ghetto and could afford an average downpayment of \$740 and monthly mortgage payments of \$50. The insignificant percentage of unemployment reported indicated a degree of income stability which would be considered an important criteria in the purchase or rental of a dwelling unit.

This Urban League survey recommended that the city fathers consider low-cost rental units the most immediate housing need for the city. These units should include an "open occupancy" policy to eliminate discrimination. A second report, a year later, noted that the "traditional neighborhood restrictions and community forces generally have served to delimit adequate housing to non-whites" while the Negro population simultaneously was increasing rapidly. The Black forced to buy or rent within the ghetto faced unreasonable and inflated prices and extreme difficulty in borrowing money since all lending institutions rated a potential Negro buyer as a generally poor investment risk.²

The second study, restricted to families with economic ability to pay a thousand dollars or more as down payment on a home, showed the average white family remaining in the area had lived in its home over ten years whereas only about half of the non-white families in the same area had been in the city for

²David S. Johnson, Jr., Director, Grand Rapids Urban League & Brough Community Assn., "A Selective Study of Open Occupancy Housing," March, 1953, Doc. File No. 93A.

the same time span. Few white occupants favored open occupancy but nearly all considered the non-white occupants as good neighbors. Home buyers generally considered the area as deteriorated with homes too large, requiring high maintenance expenditures, and needing major repairs. These were valid complaints since the area was one of the oldest residential sections of the city, the periphery of which had served at the turn of the century as homes of well-to-do families.

The same survey indicated that fears, aversions, and lack of understanding of group differences were contributing factors which prevented the Negro from obtaining proper housing and that there was little or no relationship between housing discrimination and family income. This report, like the previous one, concluded with a recommendation for low-cost, open occupancy housing financed by either private or federal funds, or both.

A third housing report made of the ghetto area in November, 1953, indicated that as early as 1947 nearly three thousand families were inadequately housed. The post war building program provided dwelling units in the outer areas of the city whereas units available to non-white families actually decreased. Serious overcrowding, more than 1.5 persons per room, was five times greater among the non-white than for white families in the city as a whole.³

³Mrs. Frances E. Coburn, "Housing in Grand Rapids and The Metropolitan Area," Community Family Life Clinic, National Council of Churches, Nov. 7, 1954, pp. 34-36.

The Federal Census of 1950 indicated that housing deterioration, and lack of required sanitary facilities in homes were far greater problems in Grand Rapids than any other urban center in the state, or even for the state as a whole. While age itself did not necessarily create sub-standard conditions, the older dwellings were more likely than not to be in need of replacement or extensive rehabilitation. The existing housing ordinance of 1914, as amended in 1915 and 1922, needed serious revision since it did not require sinks and washbowls with running water, a bath tub or shower, or inside toilets. The City Commission approved an updated Housing Ordinance on January 10, 1955.⁴

Dr. W. B. Prothro, City Health Director, blamed the deterioration of many homes on the conversion of original single family units into multiple family units without adequate regard to health and sanitation. The newly revised ordinance permitted the Health, Fire, Police, and Inspection Service Departments to issue and enforce correction orders (Art. IV) which would eliminate much of the prevalent slum conditions. However, the Health Inspector's Office could not implement the new ordinance since the staff consisted of Mr. W. L. Ettesvold, Public Health Engineer, and one assistant. These two men also carried on all inspection of weed and rodent control, school and swimming pool sanitation, new construction plans, and other environmental

⁴Ibid., pp. 43-56; See also: City of Grand Rapids, Ordinance No. 1425, Jan. 10, 1956.

health problems for the entire community. Mr. Ettesvold had requested, without success, additional inspection personnel.⁵

The Inspection Department condemned in June, 1955, eleven buildings and fourteen dwelling units; within six months the department condemned twenty-four buildings (thirty-one dwelling units) as compared to fifty-seven buildings (eighty-four dwelling units) in the previous twenty-eight months under the old ordinance. The ultimate razing of the condemned buildings eased the parking problem. Condemnation forced families to find other housing in an already overcrowded area and the condemned buildings when vacant constituted fire and safety hazards since children and vagrants had "a tendency to break into these buildings."⁶

After several months the City Manager, Donald M. Oakes, recommended on March 21, 1956, the hiring of two to four additional inspectors but it was not until July that the City Commission established a Housing Board of Appeals which also recommended the appointment of four additional inspectors. There was no Civil Service reserve list available at this time; new examinations were held and four additional inspectors hired from the new list.⁷ The larger inspection staff, and stricter housing ordinance, would result in the displacement of several hundred

⁵Mr. W. L. Ettesvold, Public Health Engineer, "Report On The Housing Program to the Human Relations Commission," July 13, 1956, Doc. File No. 5.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Grand Rapids Herald, March 21, 1956; See also: Grand Rapids Press, Aug. 23, Aug. 30, Sept. 19, 1956.

families. Mr. McNamara, Mr. Ettesvold, and Mr. Richard DeVries, President of the Grand Rapids Real Estate Board (GRREB) met to formulate plans for the relocation of these families. Unfortunately, the joint meeting produced no positive results and the unresolved questions were referred to the Housing Committee.

The new obligation caused the Committee to re-evaluate its own long range priorities. In August, 1956, the Housing Committee set for itself three ultimate objectives. The first was to make it possible for all people to purchase or rent dwelling units based purely on personal qualifications without regard to race, religion, or national origin. Although not specifically stated, this objective implied some type of an open housing ordinance. The second objective was the construction of homes or apartments "within the financial ability of minorities." Again, without specific mention, it was obvious the committee was calling for private and federal funding for the project. The final objective was to obtain a city ordinance insuring minority people that no "special charges, interest rates, down payments, or special conditions should be imposed upon any buyer or renter" because of race, religion, or national origin. A corollary to this objective was that mortgage financing and credit be made available to minority home seekers on the "same terms and under the same requirements as for other citizens."⁸

⁸"Housing Min.," Aug. 23, 1956.

The Housing Committee recommended a study be made on the effects of race on property values within the city to provide valuable data for combating "generalities" popularly believed but lacking foundation in reality. A second recommended study would evaluate health and welfare services available in minorities by both public and private agencies to determine if there were correctable problems of duplications or shortage of service. A third proposed project was to provide adequate information and services to allay panic selling in transitional neighborhoods and hereby prevent hasty flight of home owners with consequent loss of investment. Some "panic selling" was already evident which could spread and become serious. This phenomenon very frequently took place when a minority family first moved into a hitherto all white residential territory. White property owners assumed, without question, that the Black movement necessarily resulted in the decrease of value of the homes, and owners hastened to sell at prices lower than actual value. Unscrupulous real estate sellers took advantage of this fear and even promoted it at times for personal advantage. The Commission had received some complaints of this nature relative to the territory immediately East of the Ghetto division line, Eastern Avenue. The final project proposed was to determine the possibility of a privately financed, middle or low income housing development on an open occupancy basis.⁹

⁹Ibid.

One serious weakness in the Housing Committee's objectives, a weakness common to all the sub-committees, was the fault of the committee system itself, namely, the lack of coordination with the other sub-committees. Even the casual observer should have recognized that employment and housing were part of the same question; the same criticism could be leveled at the Education Committee in its relations to Housing and Employment. The Commission as a whole approved and authorized the work and project of each separate committee; too often this approval was of the "rubber-stamp" variety and the details and implications of the projects of one committee were not fully understood by the members of the other committees. Mr. McNamara failed to impress upon the total membership of each committee that it was intimately and integrally interrelated and that the problems of employment, housing, and education were in fact all components of one and the same problem. Consequently, the separate committees all too frequently went about their business without adequate knowledge of what the other Committees were attempting to achieve.

The Council of Social Agencies of Grand Rapids and Kent County requested the Human Relations Commission to determine whether "any fluctuations in property values in Grand Rapids have occurred when Negroes purchased homes in previously all-white neighborhoods."¹⁰ Such generalizations were being widely circulated

¹⁰Letter, Merle M. Mosier, Ass. Sec., Council of Social Agencies, to Harry J. Kelly, Chairman, HRC, Dec. 8, 1955, "Off. Files": Wheeler Report.

and were dangerous. Mr. McNamara recommended the study be widened to include analysis of price behavior, standards of property maintenance, market psychology, income class of occupants, and general economic conditions. Mr. McNamara suggested that the nationally recognized Laurenti report made five years previously be used as a guide line.¹¹ The Council agreed to assist in this total study.

Mr. McNamara contacted various graduate departments of Michigan State University, University of Michigan, Western Michigan College, and Wayne University to ascertain if they wished to assist in the local study and all responded favorably. Dr. A. H. Hawley, Chairman of the Department of Sociology, University of Michigan, stated he could assign immediately a third year graduate student who would conduct the study for his doctoral dissertation. The University would supervise the work and grant a fellowship (\$1,600) and the Commission would supply additional funds as needed.¹² The Commission ultimately allocated \$1,000 from the research fund and furnished forty volunteers required to conduct the preliminary interviews necessary to obtain required data.¹³

Mr. Raymond H. Wheeler, designated graduate student, prepared his study "prospectus" containing his basic hypothesis

¹¹Luigi M. Laurenti, "Effects of Non-white Purchases on Market Prices of Residences," Bureau of Business and Economics, Real Estate Research Project, U. of Calif., Berkely, 1952.

¹²"Off. Files": Wheeler Report.

¹³"Off. Min.," May 23, June 13, Oct. 10, 1956.

and his projected methodology of procedure. He recognized that the relatively stable and homogeneous population of the city had developed its own peculiar types of collective behavior which was threatened by the invasion of a different population. This threat resulted in a mass attempt at withdrawal which, in turn, depressed property values. He studied property selling prices in various areas of the city prior to the start of heavy Black migration into the city, with due consideration given to other factors of price, such as age, deterioration, or industrialization of the neighborhood. Since the socio-economic position of the Negro population was not homogeneous, and many enjoyed economic conditions comparable to middle class whites, the ultimate conclusions should recognize this fact. He recognized also that the speed of the "invasion" altered the effects on price depression thereby necessitating the study of records of real estate transactions over a period of years rather than for any single year. Also, Negro movement in geographical areas contiguous to the ghetto had different effects than movement into non-contiguous areas. He recognized the need to contact individual realtors, the block census data, tax assessment records, school census reports and conduct personal interviews.¹⁴

The preliminary summary which Mr. Wheeler submitted in July, 1957, indicated that the rapid increase of Negro population

¹⁴Raymond Wheeler, "Prospectus of the Invasion of White Residential Areas by Negroes and its Relationship to Property Values," Aug. 18, 1956, "Off. Files": Wheeler Report.

would increase for some time and therefore the movement of Negroes into hitherto all-white areas should be anticipated. In the "long term Negro area," that is areas in which one or more Negro family had lived prior to 1950, there was little evidence that the white resident would move out. In the "recent Negro area," areas into which a Negro family had moved since 1950, the indication of probable change of residency by the white family was high. There was little probability of movement of a Negro family into a "white area." In the "long term Negro area," about half of the individuals questioned indicated that they had no preference between Negro and white; less than 25% of those interviewed in the other two categories indicated "no preference." It appeared that opposition to Negro neighbors decreased in ratio to the length of time the two groups were living in a single neighborhood. Ninety-five percent of the "white area" population believed that Negro families did not take care of their property as well as did white families. This percentage dropped to 75% in the "recent Negro area" but rose to 85% in the "long term Negro area." Mr. Wheeler pointed out that these figures indicated that the social-economic condition of the recent Negro movements was of a higher level than had been the case in the past.¹⁵

The preliminary study indicated that white people evaluated Negroes as much lower than whites, even when both were in the same

¹⁵Raymond Wheeler, "Preliminary Summary," July, 1957, "Off. Files": Wheeler Report.

profession, such as the teaching profession or basic labor area. Seventy-two percent of the white people in the "recent Negro areas" believed that home selling prices would decline if a Negro family moved in, 76% in the "long term Negro area," and 85% in the "white area." Mr. Wheeler stated that the actual facts established that no appreciable difference in property values existed between blocks with Negro occupancy and those without. On the other hand, Negro families paid about 10% more than whites for comparable housing. Seventy-five percent of white residents planned to remain in their present homes if, or when, a Negro family moved into the area and even in the "white area" only 60% of the residents indicated that they would resist the movement of a Negro family into the area or move out in case of such an actuality.¹⁶

Mr. Wheeler noted that in "recent Negro areas" the selling price tended to depress temporarily, only to be re-established within a period of a few years. Also, in areas of dense Negro population, i.e., in excess of 20% of total, there was no evidence of decline of property value or property dilapidation. Investment returns on older, larger homes, when converted into multi-dwelling units, was extremely high. Finally, educated Negroes assimilated more quickly and more easily in an "all-white area" than did poorly educated Negroes. He concluded that the final and ultimate test of integration in housing was based more on individual personality and character than the issue of race itself.

¹⁶Raymond Wheeler, "Effects of Race on Property Values in Grand Rapids," July, 1957, "Off. Files": Wheeler Report, See also: "Housing Min.," Oct. 31, 1957.

The Wheeler Report gave the Commission an accurate, statistical analysis of the local condition from which block-by-block reference could be cited when necessary. It served later as a guide in the establishment of various neighborhood stabilization programs. The report provided the first factual picture of the local problem of race and property values. The conclusions did not conform generally to "popular thinking" and therefore its utilization and effectiveness lasted for nearly a decade. On the negative side, the report was not given the general publicity it merited and its essential message did not reach the general public. It produced no change in public attitudes or opinions. The news media ignored the Wheeler study, probably because the Commission failed to convince the media of its value or importance. However, the report proved extremely valuable subsequently when the Commission established major neighborhood stabilization programs in various sections of the city.

The Housing Committee first attempted to obtain new, low cost housing for minority families. It sponsored a visit to the city of Mr. Morris Milgram, the Executive Vice-President of Concord Park Homes, a nationally recognized developer of low cost, inter-racial housing units outside of Philadelphia, Pa. Mortgage money was very tight at the end of 1956 according to spokesmen of the local banks and Federal Savings and Loan Associations and neither FHA or VA loans were being made. Banks were loaning money to their regular customers only, but the Saving and Loan Associations

were making money available to new customers as well. However, the location and age of the house dictated the availability of mortgage money. All the lending institutions claimed they did not practice racial prejudice in lending money but at the same time admitted approving only minimal loans to Negroes since their desired home was most generally located in areas classified as poor grade security risks.¹⁷

Several brokers, builders, and representatives of lending institutions evidenced an interest in public housing if such a project could be developed without pressure of organized racial groups. There was little specific information available as to the potential for a similar local program and the interested individuals agreed to meet with Mr. Milgram on March 22, 1957 to discuss the total concept at a dinner meeting, with continued conferences the following day.¹⁸

Mr. Ecdal Buys, Chairman of the Housing Committee, reported that the group of builders, real estate brokers, bankers, and other interested persons attending appeared particularly impressed by two of Mr. Milgram's propositions: that a definite market existed for interracial housing development and that the quality of housing in such a development must be above average. Ten people present were able and willing to invest fifteen thousand dollars each in such a project, and Mrs. McAllister subsequently

¹⁷"Housing Min.," March 28, 1957.

¹⁸Ibid., Feb. 28, 1957.

obtained twenty-five additional interested people. The Commission, as an official agency of the city, could not promote the financial organization but could encourage and advise the group as much as possible.

The ultimate result of Mr. Milgram's visit was the "Frank's Project," the progress and activities of which the Commission watched closely, lending advice and assistance when possible. The project followed generally the recommendations of Mr. Milgram, namely to form a new interracial corporation with a \$100,000 commitment to purchase for home construction ten to twelve acres of land, with additional acreage available if required.¹⁹ The actuality of these steps consumed two years of work and struggle.

At the same time, the Housing Committee became involved in the relocation of families evicted by the construction of the new freeway, U.S. 131. Mr. Keith Honey, director of the city's Planning Commission, had primary responsibility for this relocation. He claimed at first that 850 families needed homes but later increased the number to over a thousand. Two schools, Union High and Turner Elementary, were isolated between the expressway and the river to such a degree that they were ultimately abandoned and replaced.²⁰ Mr. Buys worked directly with the City Planning Committee but two years passed before the potential

¹⁹Ibid., April 23, 1957.

²⁰Keith Honey, "West Side Renewal," Grand Rapids Urban Renewal Commission, 1956, Doc. File No. 36; See also: Grand Rapids Press, Aug. 8, 1957.

problem became an actual one. Unfortunately, it would appear that little positive action was taken during this interlude.

Mr. McNamara resigned as of January 1, 1957. His chief responsibility and achievement as the first Executive Director was in the area of organization and general publicity. He had structured the Commission, sub-divided its duties, and supervised the activities of the committees. The achievements of the committees varied greatly. In a few areas, such as establishing rapport with the Board of Education, excellent results were evident; in the area of Health and Housing, a responsibility of the Housing Committee, little was done. No one seemed to sense that effective committee structure depended almost totally on the personnel of each committee. The professional staff could not control the personal involvement of the volunteer committee members. Some members were extremely active; others seldom active. Demands of employment, civic and social life, and the exigencies of time varied from member to member. These conditions should have emphasized the necessity of appointing to the Commission individuals who had both the time and desire to serve even at the expense of personal sacrifice. Commission members with demanding duties of their own did not make the best commission members. Nothing was done to correct this problem.

Mr. McNamara had established generally good relationships with other city government officials, especially in the Police Department. Communications with the directors of Urban Renewal and Planning Committee were poor and resulted in serious problems



for years to come. He was moderately successful in explaining the purpose and goals to the general public by frequent speaking appearances to various groups but the great mass of the public were not yet aware of the purpose, activities, or potential of the Commission when Mr. McNamara resigned.

More important, it would appear that the people most in need of the Commission, the minorities and lower social-economic levels of population, were the least familiar with the activities of the Commission. They seemed to believe that the Human Relations Commission was just one more city agency from which they were excluded and which stood as a "buffer" agency between them and the high ranking officials of the City Hall--another agency to complicate the normal operations of business insofar as the people themselves were concerned.



CHAPTER VI

COMMITTEE ACTIVITY AND COMMISSION INACTIVITY

The Human Relations Commission was without an Executive Director for the first nine months of 1958. Mr. Berton G. Braun, Assistant City Manager, assumed the position of Director in addition to his other duties. Lacking professional leadership, the Commission and its sub-committees accomplished little during this interim period. Despite lack of achievement, the Commission failed to recognize the key role which the Executive Director played. It was the Director who subtly suggested, or submitted researched data, which required action programs. The Commission members who did recognize this facet of the Director's activities were generally quite willing to follow his leadership. After all, he was the professional and full time employee whereas the Commissioners were not. Only on rare occasions did conflict arise between the Executive Director and the Commission.

The Personnel Committee, "reactivated" to help select a new Director, received twenty replies to the two hundred notices of job availability and specifications distributed on December 17, 1957 by Mr. Frank Schulte, Head of Personnel. Five of the seven candidates invited for an oral interview appeared, three of whom were selected and recommended for certification.¹

¹"Off. Min.," March 27, 1958.



Mr. Schulte vetoed a suggestion from the Commission that the same eligibility list be used to fill the position of Assistant Executive Director. He informed the Commission this would be both illegal and impractical because of the salary differential of the two positions and because the job specifications for the two places were not interchangeable. Moreover, the City Commission had made no budget allotment for the second position.

The City Manager, Mr. Alfred Rypstra, personally visited the towns in which the candidates resided to obtain additional information. A month passed during which no action was taken. The highest ranking candidate was Mr. Gung Hsing Wang from Chicago whose qualifications and experience background were clearly superior to any of the other candidates. However, the members of the Personnel Committee seriously questioned whether an Oriental could work effectively in a city in which there were practically no Orientals. It hesitated to recommend his appointment even when requested to do so by Mr. Rypstra.²

The situation became somewhat clarified prior to the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Commission due to the mechanics of Civil Service procedure. One of the three certified candidates requested that her name be removed from the available list which automatically moved the number four applicant into a position of eligibility. The candidate, Mr. Ricardo Meana also of Chicago, was actually the first choice of the Personnel Committee. Mr. Rypstra

²Ibid., April 24, 1958.

appointed Mr. Meana upon the formal recommendation of the Commission with effective date of employment set as Sept. 1, 1958.³

The Personnel Committee never made public the specific details and background of this appointment and only a scant and sketchy outline of the difficulties appeared in the official records. In fact, not all of the members of the Commission itself were ever aware of the problem. Mr. Schulte, head of the Civil Service Personnel, privately accused the Personnel Commission of rank discrimination for rejecting Mr. Wang because of his Oriental background since he was obviously better qualified and had far greater experience than any of the candidates. The Personnel Committee believed strongly that the minority groups in the city would not accept Mr. Wang and thereby negate much of his potential effectiveness. No public statement was ever made to the news media, or even to the entire Commission, and technically the legal procedural mechanics of law were followed. However, it is obvious that the appointment of Mr. Meana was based at best on a questionable legal technicality.

The Commission sponsored an informal reception for Mr. Meana at the Grand Rapids Art Gallery on October 20, 1958 and prepared a brochure explaining the work and the objectives of the Commission for all who attended. Over a thousand invitations were mailed and attendance at the reception was generally good, except that none of the city commissioners except the Mayor attended, and only a few

³Ibid., May 22, 1958.

members of the clergy. The absence of these individuals seemed to indicate that the work of the Commission was not of vital concern to City Hall officialdom. Obviously it was not!⁴

The fiscal budget for the city (1958-59) had made no provision for the hiring of an assistant to the Executive Director although the enabling Ordinance authorized this position. The obviously unhealthy condition which existed within the Commission during the interim period could have been avoided, at least in part, had there been a professional Assistant Director to continue the work of the committees. The City Fathers ignored a request for appropriations for funding this position and the City Manager turned down a second direct request because of the current city economy drive. The Commission felt this refusal reflected only too accurately the attitude of the City Commissioners in their evaluation of the Human Relations Commission as a vital force in the community. The Commission postponed any further action until Mr. Meana had become fully acquainted with his new position.⁵

One major error of omission had been corrected during the interim period between Directors. The Commission knew very little of the problems, or even the members, of the Spanish-speaking population of the city. Mr. Daniel Vargas, president of the Sociedad Mutualista Circulo Mexicano, reported that there had been but four Spanish-speaking families in the city in 1941.

⁴Ibid., June 26, 1958, Oct. 23, 1958.

⁵Ibid., Jan. 9, 1958.

Mr. Vargas was sent to Texas during the labor shortage of World War II and was personally responsible for the immediate migration of several families with the guarantee of factory employment. By 1957 approximately 3,000 Spanish-speaking Americans lived in the city, located chiefly on the edge of the Black ghetto. The Sociedad Mutualista Circulo Mexicano attempted to help these people but a serious language barrier existed between them and the various department personnel in city government. Subsequently, Mr. Vargas was appointed to fill the next vacancy on the Human Relations Commission.⁶

Between January and September, 1958, when the Commission was without a full time director, the Legal and Civil Rights Committee was inactive, as evidenced by the lack of a single mention of the committee in either the Official Minutes of the Commission or the Minutes of the committee itself. Without the direction of professionally trained leadership, the best intentioned "volunteer" group lacked direction and initiative of its own. Similarly, the Employment Committee existed in this same state of "limbo," holding no meetings and not mentioned once in the official records. Mr. Paul Moore continued to be a member of the local FEPC Advisory Council but the Commission was not involved directly in any of the Council's activities.

The Housing Committee met in March with representatives of eight city organizations to exchange ideas. A summary of this

⁶Ibid., Jan. 9, Feb. 25, March 27, 1958.



meeting appeared in the minutes of the Committee but no action resulted. Nor did the Committee take any action on Dr. Plummer's proposal from the NAACP for the establishment of a Citizens' Council on Housing.⁷

The Education Committee did operate during the interim period when there was no director, but at a much reduced pace. Plans for a second conference with secondary school principals on intergroup relations were postponed until the arrival of a new Director. The Committee asked the Acting Director, Mr. Braum, to schedule a conference with School Superintendant Dr. Buikema to discuss assignment of Negro teachers, but no action was taken.⁸ However, the Commission continued to sponsor and pay the expenses of two police officers at the annual "Institute on Police-Community Relations" at Michigan State University.

The Board of Education asked the Commission to give official and formal support to a proposed new millage tax. The Education Committee refused this request on the ground that such support was beyond the authorized scope of action of the Commission. The Committee did remind all Commission members that there would be a drastic cut in school budget for the insuing year if the millage vote failed and urged all members, as individuals, to take a strong position.⁹

⁷"Housing Min.," March 18, 1958.

⁸"Off. Min.," Jan. 16; April 24, 1958.

⁹Ibid., June 26, 1958.

The Human Relations Commission did not seem to realize how little was accomplished during the first eight months of 1958. Mr. Braun's obligations as Assistant City Manager left him little opportunity to work with the Commission. In spite of the requirement in the enabling ordinance, the Commission did not even meet in July or August and the work of the Commission remained in a state of suspended animation for nine months.

Mr. Ricardo Meana, the New Executive Director had received his Bachelor's Degree in Sociology from the University of Chicago and his Doctor of Jurisprudence from De Paul University. He had served as Field Services Supervisor for the Chicago Commission on Human Relations and, in addition, was fluent in Spanish.¹⁰

The first pressing problem Mr. Meana had to handle involved an altercation between the police and several Spanish speaking Americans. A minor disturbance had broken out which, according to Mr. Vargas, had ended prior to the arrival of the police. The police allegedly shoved the spectators around and struck several people with their night sticks. A Puerto Rican, protesting his innocence, was struck by the police for resisting arrest and his wife pushed to the sidewalk. Mr. Vargas felt that the police action had been excessive and directed against the Spanish speaking Americans as a group. Mr. Meana's subsequent investigation did not establish positive evidence of police brutality, but clearly established the lack of communications between the police and the

¹⁰Grand Rapids Civil Service Commission, "Personnel Records," Mr. Ricardo Meana.

Spanish speaking population. This problem was included in all future police orientation and in-service training programs. Mr. Meana discovered that similar problems existed within other departments of the city's government, with particular communication problems experienced in welfare cases involving Spanish speaking citizens. Mr. Vargas requested that the city hire some Spanish speaking personnel for specific offices. His request was honored in principle; but Civil Service procedure prohibited special preference being given to bilingual individuals unless the job specification made this ability an essential part of the position. At the time, no city position required bilingual ability.¹¹

Mr. Meana quickly recognized the internal structural weakness of the Commission's "committee system." Several Standing Committees were serving no valid purpose; the Budget Committee was unnecessary since the Director, together with the City Manager, prepared the budget; the Policy and Procedure Committee had no justification for existence once the general routine had been established; the Personnel Committee was needed only when necessary to select a new Director or Assistant Director. Mr. Meana recommended, and the Commission concurred, in the abolition of these committees and the reassignment of their members to active committees. The Executive Committee was enlarged to include some members other than committee chairmen. Since this Committee

¹¹"Off. Min.," Sept. 4, 1958, March 5, 1959.

normally met at luncheon sessions, it was necessary that its membership be confined to members who could be available.¹²

The Commission approved the application of Mr. Paul Jansma, a graduate of the University of Michigan, for intern work. He took over some of the work load of the position of the non-existent Assistant Director, helped in the general routine of office work and in the preparation of special reports for the first six months of 1959.¹³

Mr. Meana recognized the poor communications which existed between the Commission and the City Fathers who appeared to consider the Commission as a paper organization established to satisfy the requests of the minority groups. The consistent refusal of the City Commission to even consider the appointment of an Assistant Director, as mandated in the enabling ordinance, seemed to prove him correct. Mr. Meana suggested an annual, formal dinner meeting be held with the City Commissioners. The first, and last, such meeting was held on September 25, 1959 with all but one City Commissioner in attendance, as well as the City Manager and his assistant, and Mr. William Layton, Regional Director of the State FEPC.

Mrs. Helen Claytor reviewed the past history of the Commission as a municipal agency and briefly outlined its purpose and objectives. The chairmen of the four major sub-committees

¹²Ibid., Nov. 13, 1958.

¹³Ibid., Sept. 24, 1959.

gave brief, summary reports of the problems and activities of each, and Mr. Meana spoke on the growing housing problem within the ghetto and the excellent rapport existing between the Commission and the Police, Health & Recreation Departments, the Planning Commission, the Board of Education and the FEPC. Dr. Frederick B. Routh, Executive Director of the Michigan FEPC, addressed the group on "The Role of Municipal Human Relations Commission." He stressed the importance of the local agency of municipal government in various areas. In spite of the excellent program, the joint meeting was by no means an unqualified success. Only two of the City Commissioners remained for the after-dinner program. There was no apparent change in the attitudes of the City Commissioners in the subsequent months nor did they authorize the filling of the position of Assistant Director.¹⁴

A further, and even more obvious, indication of the low regard which the City Commission held of the Human Relations Commission took place in June, 1960. The HRC itself was moved from the City Hall to the Annex, 303 Ionia, N. W., indicating to many how important the City Commission considered the HRC to be. Moreover, it was announced in the same month that henceforth Mr. Meana would allocate three-fifths of his time for his newly assigned position as Assistant City Attorney in the Police Court and only two-fifths of his time to the position for which he had been hired. This dual assignment was part of the general economy

¹⁴Ibid., Sept. 24, 1959, Feb. 24, 1960.

drive necessitated by the financial condition of the city. Mr. Meana remained on this split shift basis until he resigned as Director at the end of the year.¹⁵

During the next eight months the Commission met but four times. Its annual budget was drastically reduced, seriously hampering activity, but without formal protest of the Commission. Mr. Meana announced in December, 1960, his full time appointment to the City Attorney's Office and introduced Mr. Joseph G. Zainea as the new interim director. Mr. Zainea's only previous experience was the few months he had served as an assistant in the City Manager's Office. The Commission had not been consulted previously concerning this change of personnel. Mrs. Hutchins voiced the opinion, shared unanimously by the Commission members, that the City Commissioners were not aware of the role, objective, or needs of the Human Relations Commission and probably never would become aware of its role until some overt violence should disrupt the civic peace.¹⁶

It must be noted, however, that the Commission members seemed to envision their role as positive only in the work of the subcommittees of which they individually were members. The Official Records give no indication whatsoever that the Commission ever recommended one single piece of solid legislation to the City Commission during its first six years of operation. The Commission

¹⁵Ibid., Dec. 1, 1960.

¹⁶Ibid.

appeared to see its task as an organization restricted to prevent any overt troublesome action from taking place rather than attempt to remove the causes of discontent except by means of education or conciliation.

Moreover, the general effectiveness of the Commission was open to serious question. It appeared that the activity of the Commission was almost totally dependent upon the character, interest, and time of the Executive Director who in theory was responsible for his action to the Human Relations Commission while directly responsible because of his Civil Service status to the City Manager for salary and promotions. Whereas sub-committees operated within their own spheres of interest with greater or lesser achievement, the Commission as a whole had not initiated any potential legislation or positive program, but rather had accepted for action those programs proposed and presented by the separate sub-committees.

During the Meana directorate the Legal & Civil Rights Committee was conspicuously inactive. The local office of the State FEPC handled much of the work originally allocated to this group and the Commission staff referred alleged complaints of employment discrimination to the state agency for action.

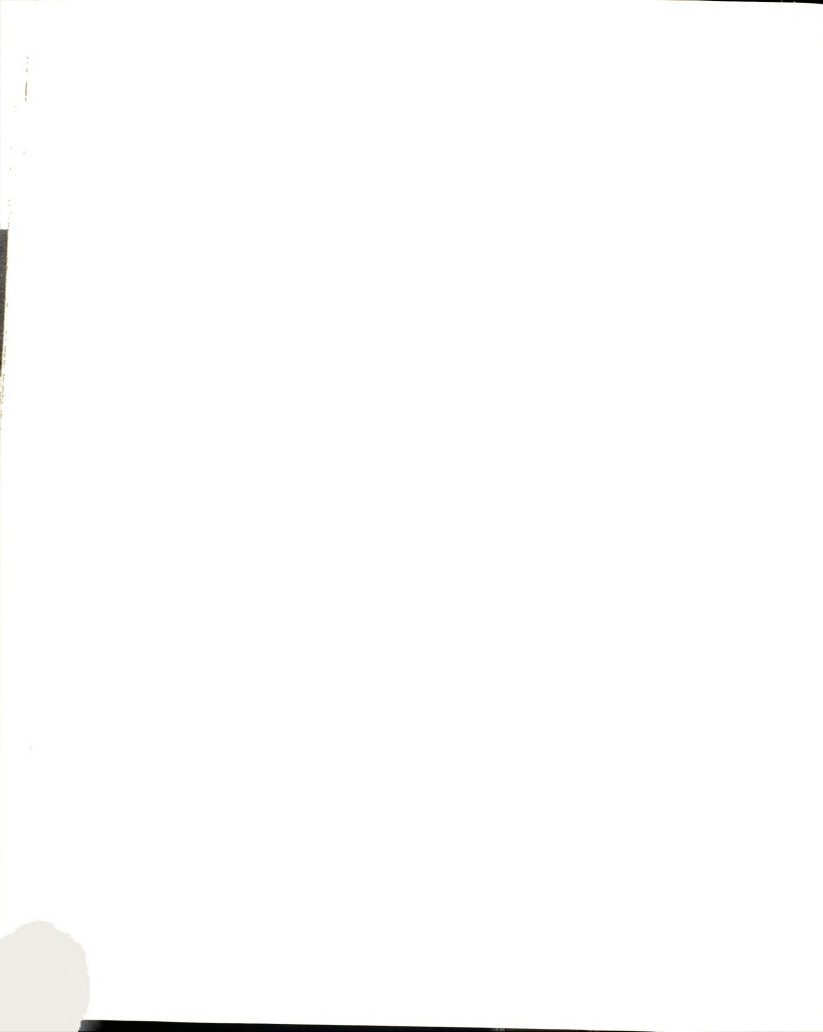
Moreover, Mr. Meana's legal background frequently enabled him to take direct action when required rather than wait for the committee to assemble. This was particularly true in areas of alleged "police brutality" where the complaint was given directly

to the Chief of Police who, after investigation, reported back in writing to Mr. Meana.

One exception to this procedure concerned alleged discrimination on the basis of color at the Shangri-La skating rink. The owner-operator claimed exemption from the state law prohibiting racial discrimination in recreational areas on grounds that the Shangri-La was a private club which admitted only individuals possessing membership cards. However, white customers did not have to show their membership card for admission and no membership card was issued to Blacks or Spanish-speaking youngsters. Dr. W. W. Plummer, President of the local chapter of the NAACP, had instituted suit in the Police Court. This was the first civil rights trial held in the city and ended in a hung jury.¹⁷

Mr. Meana and two lawyers on the Legal & Civil Rights Committee negotiated with the owner-manager and achieved moderate success in that he agreed to reserve the entire rink for non-whites one day a week. He stated that the segregated basis was essential because the Negroes "skated differently than whites," performing more "interpretative" skating and demanding "louder, faster, and jazzier music." He stated further that non-whites did not have membership cards since they failed to submit the required personal references. The Civil Rights Committee agreed not to take further action unless or until the NAACP filed another complaint. If such a complaint were to be made, the Executive

¹⁷Grand Rapids Press, April 11, 1957.



Director was directed to attempt further conciliation before returning the case to the committee.¹⁸ The issue ended only when the skating rink closed shortly thereafter leaving the Commission with an empty victory.

The failure of the committee to effect conciliation in the Shangri-La case pointed up a serious weakness in the enabling ordinance. The ordinance permitted the Commission to investigate and hold formal hearings on matters of alleged discrimination but gave it no power whatsoever to force the defendant to respond if he elected to remain mute. In such a situation the entire matter was turned over to the City Attorney for action. Without the power of "cease and desist" the Commission had only advisory and conciliatory power.¹⁹

The only other action of the Legal & Civil Rights Committee was the publication and distribution of an additional thousand copies of the pamphlet "Your Civil Rights" which it had compiled earlier. The original supply was exhausted but classroom teachers were still requesting copies. Only a small new supply was printed since pending state and federal legislation would shortly make a revision necessary.²⁰

¹⁸Grand Rapids Human Relations, "Off. Files: 'Shangri-La Case.'"

¹⁹Legal & Civil Rights Com., "Off. Min.," Feb. 5, 1959; See also: Grand Rapids City Ordinances, No. 1396, April 5, 1955.

²⁰Ibid., April 3, 1959.

CHAPTER VII

RELIGION IN POLITICS

The local and national elections of 1959 and 1960 brought before the Human Relations Commission the problem of religious discrimination. The possibility of a Roman Catholic president was objectionable to some Grand Rapids citizens. There were also a few minor allegations of religious discrimination which appeared, none of which were serious enough to require formal Commission action.

The first serious manifestation of religious bias appeared in connection with the local elections of 1959. The Berean Baptist Church published the following item in one of its weekly church bulletins:

THIS PERTINENT INFORMATION HAS BEEN BROUGHT TO OUR ATTENTION. The time has come when all members of Protestant Churches should pay more attention to government and know something about the background of candidates for office. How many of your church members know that we already have 3 Catholics on our City Commission of 7 men, and 1 on the School Board? At the primary election of Feb. 15 our citizens will face a slate of candidates in all wards which will include a Catholic for every office--City Commission, Board of Education, Board of Supervisors, etc. It is a well known fact that its societies, clubs, and churches profit by violations of gambling and liquor laws. While our Protestant Churches are wrapping themselves in a 'cloak of keeping out of politics,' other sources, including some unscrupulous unions, are taking over our government--local, state and national. Surely our churches should be leading in such a vital matter as education for

clean government, at the same time avoiding partisan politics.¹

Rev. Norman Vernon of Detroit, preaching at the Berean Baptist Church on the morning this "Bulletin" was issued, stated:

The Roman Catholic hierarchy has a time table for taking over America and between 1965 and 1970 they expect to join church and state. They now largely control the press. Ninety-five percent of the Roman Catholic Members in the U.S.A. don't know the plans of the hierarchy.

The State Fair Election Practices Commission received from the Education Commission a copy of the church bulletin and Rev. Vernon's public statement. This group sent a telegram to the Pastor of the Berean Church which read in part:

Am quoting from the unanimous declaration of the Fair Election Practices Commission. 'We repudiate in no uncertain terms every appeal whether through campaign literature or from the platform to racial and religious prejudice. A political group making use of such bigoted attacks has no place on the American scene. Any candidate who refers sneering or slightly to an opponent's religion or race disqualifies himself for a position of trust in our government.'²

The religious issue was kept alive in the city through the publication of The Protestant News, the first issue of which appeared on April 1, 1959. In September of the same year the name of the paper was changed to the Christian News. Rev. Larry Asman, editor-publisher, stated the paper was "Dedicated to help keep Grand Rapids a strong, enlightened, Protestant community." Subsequent issues of the paper continued to attack Catholics in politics

¹ Berean Baptist Church "Bulletin," reprinted in The Protestant News, Vol. 1, No. 1 (April 1, 1959). (Complete file of this publication contained in the HRC "Off. Files": "Churches.")

² Human Relations Commission, "Off. Files": Churches, April 11, 1959.

at both the local and the national level, such as the quotation of a local pastor who stated that it was the intent of the Roman Pope to "regulate the politics of American Roman Catholics":

The clear-cut intrusion by the Pope into American politics has been reached. . . . We are drawing near the time when we shall have the election of a new President of the United States and a Roman Catholic, Senator Kennedy, has become a favorite in the minds of many people. That this Roman Catholic, Senator Kennedy, has his little 'fights' or differences with Rome is only a sly cloak to hide from the eyes of sleeping Protestants and misguided Catholics the real intent and purpose of his election.³

Another local Pastor was quoted in the same issue as saying:

Roman Catholics are filling our government offices. We are dependent on them to protect our Constitution and our freedom. Yet they belong to an organization which is diametrically opposed to our United States Constitution and to our religious freedom.⁴

The Christian (Protestant) News implied in May, 1959, that the failure to rehire City Manager Donald M. Oakes had resulted from the two Catholic members of the City Commission who objected to his enforcement of the laws against rackets and vice, specifically, bingo as played in many church basements on church owned property.⁵

The local religious-political issue reached its peak in March, 1960, when just prior to election, a cartoon signed by L. Asman appeared in the Christian (Protestant) News which portrayed Mayor Stanley Davis buying votes from a tavern owner. In

³Ibid., June, 1959.

⁴Christian (Protestant) News, June, 1959, Vol. I, No. 3.

⁵Ibid., June, 1959, Vol. I, No. 9.

the same issue the editor stated clearly that the entire Civil Rights movement in America was inspired by Communists. More guarded references indentifying Civil Rights leaders as Communists had been printed earlier but the visit of Mr. Langston Hughes was sufficient to make the issue public at this time. A special election sheet appeared containing the original cartoon against Mayor Davis together with a second cartoon signed by L. Asman showing Mayor Davis and First Ward Commissioner, Mr. Bernard Barto, throwing rocks at church activities which were rescuing victims from the control of liquor interests. The same sheet contained a lengthy letter which stated that Negroes consistently voted for Mayor Davis whereas white citizens voted for "good government and good law enforcement."⁶

Mayor Davis promptly instituted civil suit against the paper and its editor for \$300,000. The paper ceased publication because of the suit and because the Federal Communications Commission was investigating the affiliation of the paper with a local radio station. In the final issue of the paper the Christian people of Grand Rapids were urged to continue the fight.⁷

The Human Relations Commission considered the alleged bias of the paper on several occasions but the only action taken was to request Mr. Meana to investigate and report back. Mr. Meana was further directed to investigate the possibility of obtaining

⁶Ibid., March, 1960, Vol. 1, No. 12.

⁷Ibid., Dec. 1960, Vol. II, No. 9.

national foundation funds to study the problem of inter-religious relations in the city. No further action was initiated and once Mayor Davis instituted the civil suit, the Commission felt it no longer had any jurisdiction or responsibility.⁸ The reluctance of the Commission to act on this major issue constituted a conspicuous failure on its part. It was obvious that the members preferred to stay out of the issue entirely because of the politics involved, in spite of the direct responsibility imposed by Charter provisions.

The injection of religion into the local election scene caused Dr. Donald H. Bauma, Professor of Sociology at Calvin College, and a Commission member, to direct a study concerning religious attitudinal patterns towards the Grand Rapids Dutch. Dr. Bouma wanted to determine whether the local citizens considered the Dutch ethnic group as a separate unit within the city, prejudiced against other church and minority groups, more conservative politically and less capable of being absorbed into the American way of life. The analysis of response to questionnaires sent out indicated a definite degree of anti-Dutch attitudes in the city with 60% of the citizens questioned feeling the Dutch as an ethnic group were not progressive and only half of the people questioned believing the Dutch integrated quickly into the American stream. In all instances, the non-white respondents were more critical than

⁸Human Relations Commission, Executive Committee, Minutes, June 11, 1959.

the whites and were particularly critical of the "clannishness of the Dutch."⁹

Each member of the Commission received a copy of the final report but absolutely no official action was taken. Again, the Commission was given an excellent tool with which to take positive action against discrimination. However, it made no effort to take positive steps further indicating the Commission's reluctance to act on questions of religious or ethnic discrimination.

Mr. Wendell Verduin prepared another study under Dr. Bouma in 1960 relative to religious attitudes of students. Unfortunately, the Public School officials would not permit students in their schools to participate in this attitudinal study on the grounds that the subject matter was "too personal and private." As a result the control group consisted of students from the three Christian and one Catholic secondary schools as well as students from both Calvin and Aquinas Colleges. The only major attitudinal difference observed was that students from the Christian Reformed institutions believed strongly that the religious affiliation of a candidate for public office was an important factor in determining a candidate's qualification whereas students of the Catholic institutions did not.¹⁰ Commission members received copies of

⁹Attitudes of Selected Whites & Non-Whites Towards the Dutch in Grand Rapids," Dr. Donald H. Bouma, Director, Calvin College Sociology Dept., June 11, 1959, Doc. File No. 31.

¹⁰Wendell Verduin, "A Study of Religious Attitudes In Selected High School and College Age Groups," Dr. Donald H. Bouma Director, 1960, Doc. File No. 31A.

this report but the official records do not indicate any action taken--another effective, educational tool ignored and filed.

In view of the impending religious issue of the national elections of 1960, Dr. Buikema, Superintendent of Public Schools, appointed a special committee of teachers and parents to evaluate the role of religion in the public elementary schools. The final report stated that the public school philosophy recognized that religious freedom was basic to the "American Way" of life and that religious education was the responsibility of the home and church, not the school. The schools must remain definitely non-sectarian but "friendly" to religion. Teachers should encourage respect for religious beliefs without making any comparisons or evaluations. Teaching "about" religion was obligatory since the religious motif was prominent in the arts, the literature, and the history of all nations; teaching a specific religion was definitely prohibited. Teachers should permit children to talk about God, their religion, their beliefs and practices but the teacher should never solicit information which was not "offered voluntarily and without tension." Teachers should be aware of differences in dietary laws, holidays, and other customs, observances, and regulations of various religious demoninations. To assist the teacher, a detailed chart was included in the report covering holidays, places of worship, titles of spiritual leaders, religious symbols, and regulations of creeds known to exist in the city. The report included suggestions as to special practices

or holiday observances permitted or prohibited in the public schools.¹¹

Again Commission members received copies of the report and took no action whatsoever. In fact, the Commission took no part in any issue or study which involved religion or ethnic groups. Certainly the time was ripe, and the materials available, for a direct attack against all types of religious and ethnic bias existing in the city but nothing was done and reports were "received and filed."

¹¹Dr. Benjamin J. Buikema, "Role of Religion in the Public Elementary Schools," Grand Rapids, Mich., 1960, Doc. File No. 31B.



CHAPTER VIII

LOSING THE FIGHT AGAINST DE FACTO SEGREGATION

The Commission did express considerable concern with the obvious increase of de facto segregation in education. Board of Education statistics showed that 90% of all non-white students were concentrated in eight of the forty-two public schools, all eight located in the Campau Area; fourteen schools had less than six non-white students and an additional fourteen schools had non whatsoever. The housing segregation patterns and consequent composition of the schools on racial lines resulted from the concept of the neighborhood school:¹

PERCENTAGE OF NON-WHITE ENROLLMENT IN GHETTO LOCATED SCHOOLS

<u>School</u>	<u>1947-48</u>	<u>1952-53</u>	<u>1957-58</u>	<u>1958-59</u>
Franklin	66	78	81	85
Henry	55	70	75	81
Sheldon	17	61	84	85
Vandenberg	16	25	57	68
Madison	07	7	43	51
Maplewood (Opened in 1955)			70	86
Campau Park (Opened in 1957)			95	93
Jefferson	0	5	24	30
Totals	27	44	64	70

¹Hillary Bissell, "Current Statistics on Non-White Enrollment in the Grand Rapids Public Schools," Jan., 1959, HRC "Off. Files": Schools.

Another study made a year later showed that white enrollment in all public schools between 1947-1959 increased less than 20% whereas non-white enrollment had increased 155%, nearly 40% of the total student population increase of six thousand was non-white. As usual, students in the non-public schools were excluded since these institutions housed only a few non-white pupils.²

This second Bissell report recognized that the Negro residential area west of Division Avenue was being converted rapidly into commercial use but there was a compensating extension of Negro housing on the eastern end of the ghetto. This movement automatically affected school population in hitherto all-white areas. Thus, Sigsbee School in 1951 had less than 5% non-white, 20% in 1955 and 35% in 1959. Alexander School enrolled one, three, and ten percent non-whites for the same dates. By 1959 South High School had 35% Black population, Central High School had 18% and Ottawa 5% whereas Creston High School in the north end of the city and Union High on the west side both had less than one percent non-white. Non-white drop-out rate remained extremely high, only 49 Black seniors graduating in 1960. The Police Department reported a direct ratio of Negro crime incidents with the percentage of Negro drop-out students but provided no supporting evidence for this claim.³

²Ibid., Feb. 25, 1960, HRC, "Off. Files": Schools.

³Ibid.

The population trend of white families moving into the suburban areas during the 1950s, with no decline in the city's total population, verified the two Bissell reports. There were nearly fifteen thousand Blacks in the city in 1960 with only twenty-seven families living outside the "Black belt." Nearly 3,500 Spanish-speaking people from the southwestern states (and a few from Puerto Rico and Mexico) had found residence in the older sections of town. Most of the newcomers of both groups were without skill or labor training or adequate education to enable them to obtain work other than basic labor employment. The obvious conclusions were that housing segregation and de facto education were far more serious in 1960 than they had been ten years previously.⁴

This obvious growth of de facto segregation reopened the question of the assignment pattern of non-white teachers. Dr. Plummer and Rev. John V. Williams, President and Education Committee Chairman respectively of the NAACP, expressed their "deep concern" in the matter. There were only twenty-seven Black teachers among the 1,200 teachers in the system; twenty Black teachers taught in schools with over 70% non-white students and no Negro teacher was assigned to schools with all white student bodies. They accused the Board of Education of reflecting the "old south thinking that Negroes know best how to teach Negroes and how to deal with their own kind."

⁴Human Relations Commission, "Racial and Ethnic Background of Newcomers to Grand Rapids," 1960, Doc. File No. 68.

Students are aware that there is a pattern of discrimination in the assignment of Negro-American teachers. This is damaging to the Negro student because he sees in his own educational system the segregation pattern; it is damaging to the vocational aspirations of students when those whom they should look as status symbols are victims of this pattern. While many pay lipservice to good human relations, we cannot teach sound intergroup relations while at the same time denying the majority of white students direct experience with educated Negro-Americans.⁵

The report requested a re-examination and adjustment of school assignment policies and procedures and a copy of the full report was sent to the Human Relations Commission. A follow-up letter three months later specifically requested that the Human Relations Commission take action.⁶ However, the only action taken was a response by Mr. H. P. Herrington, Board of Education Secretary, to the original NAACP communication, explaining in detail why the existing placement policies were completely non-discriminatory in regard to race, color, or creed and which were made on a "prognosis for the most effective learning on the part of the children." Mr. Herrington stated that "open transfer for all teachers" existed and that teachers could request transfer of assignment any time prior to April 15th of each year.⁷

One group of the Commission's Education Committee believed that teacher assignments were based on sound professional grounds

⁵Dr. W. W. Plummer and Rev. John V. Williams, Letter to the Grand Rapids Board of Education, Sept. 2, 1958, HRC, "Off. Files": Schools.

⁶Dr. W. W. Plummer, Letter to Grand Rapids Board of Education, Dec. 1, 1958, HRC, "Off. Files": Schools.

⁷Mr. H. P. Herrington, Letter to Grand Rapids Chapter, NAACP, Dec. 8, 1958, HRC, "Off. Files": Schools.

and that the Education Committee was not qualified to make judgment on teacher assignments. Moreover, there had been progress in the hiring and assignment of non-white teachers over a ten year period, even though the progress was not as rapid as the growth in the Black school age population. The majority report of the committee recommended that the favorable relationship between the Board of Education and the Commission should not be jeopardized by making teacher assignment a major issue. This report indicated belief that the School Board would resent the intrusion of non-professionals and that the Commission was not strongly enough entrenched in local public opinion or political strength to engage in a contest with the Board of Education.⁸

The Minority Report stated that Negro teachers did not request transfer to all-white schools because they believed such a request would be denied and would put the teachers in a bad position with the school administrators. White students were being discriminated against by not being exposed to Negro teachers. The primary purpose of the schools was not merely to present subject matter but to act as a social-integrating agency to prepare students for the reality of daily living. The Commission reached no agreement and requested the Executive Director and Education Commission to settle the problem with the representatives of the Board of Education.⁹

⁸Ed. Com., "Off. Min," Sept. 4, 1958.

⁹Ibid.

Mr. Meana and two members of the committee interviewed all the Negro teachers. Many preferred teaching in essentially Black schools where they believed they were more effective and more "comfortable;" they did not believe their primary duty as teachers to be in the vanguard of community social relations. The three investigators found no evidence whatsoever of racial discrimination in teacher assignments although some teachers believed that a request for assignment to all-white schools would not be honored if made. The Human Relations Commission accepted the Majority Report and took no further action.¹⁰

At the same time the Commission was investigating the teacher assignment policy, it was projecting a series of teacher in-service training workshops jointly sponsored by the Commission, National Council of Christians and Jews, and the Board of Education. Dr. Louis Radelet, Director of Community Organization for the NCCJ, and one of the founders of the National Institute on Police-Community Relations at Michigan State University, had been very favorably impressed by the police sponsored Youth Commonwealth of Grand Rapids. Dr. Radelet felt a similar program should be developed with personnel of the Board of Education.¹¹

Conducting the first of five day-long teacher training programs, Dr. Donald H. Bouma discussed the role of the school

¹⁰Ibid., Dec. 19, 1958, Jan. 30, 1959.

¹¹Grand Rapids Press, Nov. 4, 1959; See also: "Ed. Min.," Nov. 12, 1959.

administrators in the racial issue.¹² Dr. William E. Vickery, Director of NCCJ Commission on Educational Organization, addressed the second session on the problems of working with culturally retarded minority children;¹³ Dr. Alvin Loving, Director of Flint College of the University of Michigan followed in the next session covering the subject of white public image of ghettoized Blacks.¹⁴ Dr. Robert J. Havighurst, University of Chicago, spoke on the educational differentials which existed in the schools of the suburbs, the total city, and the core city.¹⁵ Dr. William E. Wattenberg, Professor of Educational Psychology, concluded the series with the discussion on methods useful in working with "explosive" problem children in the schools.¹⁶

All members of the Human Relations Commission, as well as interested members of the Public School staffs, received copies of all the lectures. Everyone involved in the series agreed on the need for expanded counselling and guidance services in the

¹²Dr. Donald H. Bouma, "This is Grand Rapids," Lecture, Jan. 12, 1960, HRC, "Off. Files": Educators' Meetings.

¹³Dr. William E. Vickery, "Working with Academically & Culturally Retarded Children," Lecture, Jan. 26, 1960, HRC, "Off. Files": Educators' Meetings.

¹⁴Dr. Alvin Loving, "Resolving the Social Conflict Within Our Negro Goupr," Lecture, Feb. 2, 1960, HRC, "Off. Files": Educators' Meetings.

¹⁵Dr. Robert T. Havighurst, "Improving Holding Power with Minority Group Students," Lecture, April 26, 1960, HRC, "Off. Files": Educators' Meetings.

¹⁶Dr. William E. Wattenberg, "Coping with Aggressive Behavior of Adolescents," May 12, 1960, HRC, "Off. Files": Educators' Meetings.

schools, more work-study programs, and the lowering of pupil-teacher ratio in the core schools. The follow-up program, however, was completely inadequate and ideas were not translated into action programs.¹⁷

The only lasting result of the conferences effected was the establishment of mutual trust between the Board of Education and the Human Relations Commission. Since the Board had originally looked upon the Commission with great distrust and apprehension, this new open line of communication and mutual concern was, in itself, a definitely positive development.

Like the Education Committee, the Housing Committee of the Commission was active throughout the administration of Mr. Meana. Mr. Rodger Rice, sociology Instructor at Calvin College, prepared a statistical report for the housing committee in May, 1959, consisting of twenty-two separate tables covering the period from 1900 to 1958. During this span the total population of the city increased from 88,000 to 215,000 (sic.) whereas Negro population increased from 600 to 14,000. Negro population in 1900 was less than one percent; nearly two percent in 1940 (2,725) and six and a half percent in 1958. Ten percent of the Negroes were born in the city as of 1958 whereas 70% had migrated from the deep South (45% from the single state of Mississippi!). About half were affiliated with the Baptist Church and ten percent had no church affiliation. Only seven percent of the household heads

¹⁷"Off. Min.," Jan. 28, 1960, May 25, 1960, June 29, 1960, Sept. 29, 1960.

reported any education beyond the twelfth grade and 60% had a tenth grade education or less. The median family annual income was about \$3,000; one-third being below that figure and less than three percent reported income in excess of \$7,000. Half of the Negro housing was classified as being in "Fair" condition, one-fourth in "Poor," and the rest in "Good" condition.¹⁸

The Housing Committee used the Rice Report to urge Mr. Ettesvold to stricter enforcement of the housing sanitation ordinance. Mr. Ettesvold reminded the Commission that strict enforcement resulted in great economic hardships to occupants who, forced to move, could not find other dwelling units within their ability to pay. Actually, a "double standard" inspection existed relative to minority housing to avoid this large scale displacement. Moreover, many of the owners of the substandard dwellings were absentee landlords (chiefly white) or banks who held the properties for investment purposes and were not interested in investing money for improvements.

The Health Department, assisted by the Urban League and the Community Improvement Club, undertook a house-to-house survey of a square mile within the major blighted area. The first survey reported on only external observations, such as walls, porches, windows, chimney, and general premises. A "Good" rating was given to 272 buildings, "Fair" rating to 272, and a "Poor" rating to 40 units. In the second phase of the survey five housing

¹⁸Rodger Rice, "Negroes in Grand Rapids," May, 1958, Doc. File No. 44.

inspectors recorded every internal and external violation and the owners immediately notified. Generally the owners reached an agreement with the Inspection Department as to the time and extent of repair or rehabilitation required.

A summary of deficiencies reported on the 654 units inspected indicated there were thirty-eight without baths, fifty with no hand lavatory, thirty-six without hot water heaters, twenty-six with "shared toilets" and eighty-eight without central heating. The follow-up report indicated nearly \$17,000 was spent for internal improvement and nearly \$50,000 for external improvements.¹⁹ Twelve dwelling units were either demolished or converted to commercial use; several old sheds removed, and the general external appearance of the area greatly improved. The importance of the survey was the revelation to the Commission that a community organization, working with official city departments, could effect substantial improvement in the general environment. Such a project required a minimum of legal enforcement procedure and a resulting spirit of good will and cooperation of the families in the area.²⁰ The survey established a basis which the Commission subsequently used in several neighborhood stabilization programs throughout the city.

¹⁹Richard Meana, Letter: "Fellow Citizens," March 17, 1959, Included therein: "Inspection Report," Dr. W. B. Prothro, M.D., Grand Rapids Health Dept., "Housing Min.," March 17, 1959.

²⁰"Off. Min.," March 5, 1959.

Dr. Bouma's attempt to involve the Grand Rapids Real Estate Board with the Rice Report had no results. Dr. Bouma then worked with Mr. Paul Phillips, Executive Director of the Urban League, and identified a total of thirty-two families of non-whites living outside the established ghetto area. Fourteen of these families had lived out of the area over ten years and nine families over four years. This report established the permanence of the ghetto and the necessity for constant Housing Inspection supervision. However, the 1960 city budget problems resulted in the loss of one inspector (5 to 4) but decrease of responsibility for inspection of sixty thousand dwelling units, private swimming pools, burning of trash, and other related duties.²¹

Mr. Ettesvold, with the support of Mayor Davis, urged a "crackdown against erring landlords" and threatened legal action if health regulations were not respected and repairs instituted. The Human Relations Commission gave full support to Mr. Ettesvold's proposal, as did the press and other news media. However, the City Commission took no positive action and little real effect resulted.²²

Statewide controversy over the Michigan Corporation and Securities Commission Regulation No. 9, which proposed making it illegal and a criminal offense for a licensed broker or real

²¹Harold Wiersma, "Scatterization of Negroes in Grand Rapids," May, 1960, Dr. Donald Bouma Report Supervisor, HRC, "Off. Files": Wiersma Scatterization Report; See also: Grand Rapids Press, May 15, 1960.

²²"Off. Min.," Sept. 15, 1960; See also: James Mudge, Detroit Free Press, Oct. 10, 1960; Grand Rapids Press, Oct. 10, 1960.



estate salesman to refuse his services because of race, color, religion, national origin, or ancestry, thwarted all attempts on the part of the Housing Committee to establish better lines of communication with the Real Estate Board during the spring and summer of 1960. The Commission actively supported the amendment which would help tremendously to abolish ghetto lines whereas the Real Estate Board vehemently opposed the amendment at the public hearing on the bill in Grand Rapids (June 28, 1960). Television Station WOOD, a subsidiary of Time, Inc., condemned "Rule Nine" as a "club, and a last, desperate, emergency measure" in an editorial read several times over the air waves. The outlawing of the controversial proposal by the Michigan Supreme Court in no way healed the split between the Grand Rapids Real Estate Board and the Commission.²³

Despite the fact that the Rice, Prothro, and Wiersma reports all pointed up the obvious progressive deterioration of ghetto housing, the Commission itself initiated no action of any major impact on the city. Budgetary problems forced the city to reduce the number of personnel in the Health and Inspection Services. The controversial "Rule Nine" intensified the antagonism and distrust between the Commission and the Real Estate Board. The conclusion was obvious. Greater knowledge of existing conditions did not of itself produce positive, corrective measures. The

²³Housing Min., Sept. 21, 1960; See also: WOOD-TV, "Editorial on Rule Nine," Aug. 13, 1960, Continued in Doc. File No. 41.

Commission had neither the power or authority to take action on its own and the City Commission did nothing. Nor did the Human Relations Commission offer any specific legislation or policy upon which the City Commission might have acted. In short, this period of the Meana directorate insofar as it pertained to the Housing Committee, must be classified as a period of inaction and failure.

CHAPTER IX

THE DIRECTORATE OF ALFRED COWLES

When Alfred Cowles became Executive Director in September, 1961, he set out to reactivate an almost moribund Commission. In its seven months under an interim director, Joseph Zainea, it had become little more than an adjunct of the City Manager's office. There Zainea had served and there he continued to work to the neglect of the Commission's tasks and goals. The Commission solemnly met each month and listened to reports on some gains in the school appointments and substantial losses in housing inspection. Members reacted to reports, expressed pious hopes and took no action. Their lack of zeal was evidenced in the fact that they seldom assembled their committees and then only to hear from salaried employees in other city agencies. With few policies and no action program, they were making the Commission into a private forum, and a dispirited one at that. Until it developed its own program, Mr. Zainea warned, the Commission could expect no budget increase. It could face "financial strangulation," he added, implying that its budget funds, along with any program, could be transferred to another department of city government.¹ Then, if it survived, it must be as a debating society.

¹Joseph G. Zainea, Letter to HRC members, Sept. 6, 1961, Doc. File No. 84; See also: "Off. Min.," Feb. 9, April 6, May 25, 1961.

Perhaps the Commission's only hope lay in good staff work by its new Executive Director, Alfred Cowles. Arriving in August, 1961, he brought some graduate training, and 12 years experience in group social work, and the prestige of becoming the first non-white administrator in the city's government.² His dedication was evidenced by the unsalaried month he spent in studying the Commission and its work before taking office on September 15.

What he found was not reassuring. Although he privately rated eleven of the twenty-one commissioners as "Excellent," and seven as "Good," he soon discovered that many of them served as liaison from some interest group more than as action leaders.³ For example, on Mr. Cowles' recommendation, Mayor Stanley Davis appointed Rev. Hugh Michael Beahan to fill a Commission vacancy. For reasons never clearly understood, the Catholic Ordinary of the Grand Rapids Diocese, Bishop Alan J. Babcock, took it upon himself to substitute Msgr. Charles W. Popell for Fr. Beahan and the City Commission subsequently approved the substitution without question. The propriety, as well as the legality, of this substitution was questioned since the power to appoint (and hence to substitute) resided in the City Commission, not the Bishop. The substitution was permitted to stand without official comment and henceforth the Bishop exercised this unofficial "appointment" power until the end of the life of the Commission.

²Grand Rapids Civil Service Department, "Personnel Record: Mr. Alfred Cowles."

³Letter of Recommendation for appointment to the Human Relations Commission, April 1, 1962, Doc. File No. 83.

Mayor Stanley Davis reappointed five members requested by Mr. Cowles, and a sixth not previously considered.⁴ The procedure followed in the appointment or reappointment of commission members was simple. The Commission submitted the names of potential candidates to the Mayor and City Commissioners, who, with only a few exceptions, gave formal approval. The frequent change of Commission members resulted in several members serving without knowledge of their duties or obligations. Mr. Cowles and Mr. Cumiskey prepared an orientation handbook for members stating that the major role of the Commission was to "formulate and carry out programs of community education" in order to eliminate intergroup and interracial tensions and to increase mutual understanding and good will among all people. The second objective was to formulate and recommend to the Mayor and City Commission positive legislation which might help achieve the primary ends and to recommend administrative measures for all city departments to protect against discrimination within the structure of the city itself.

The Handbook further stated that only the Executive Director would make public statements for the Commission so as to provide uniform, accurate, and effective information; no individual member should make any public statement concerning the Commission without first obtaining clearance from the Director. This procedure appeared to muzzle effectively the dissenting

⁴"Off. Min.," May 24, 1962.

members of a citizens' body. However, all meetings were open to the press and other news media by city law and it was not possible to silence voices of opposition.⁵

A few Commission members had become very outspoken in their condemnation of the City Commission because of its delay in authorizing the construction of low-cost housing units in the Campau area along South Division Avenue. The proposed location of these units would assure an all Negro occupancy. These same commission members were extremely vocal in this criticism of Mr. Cowles and the majority of the Human Relations Commissioners who opposed the construction on the basis of racial segregation. The issue came to a dramatic head when the City Commission amended the enabling ordinance on April 17, 1965, with no prior notice of intent having been given to the HRC. The amended ordinance terminated all prior appointments as of May 3, 1965, and reduced the total membership of the Commission from twenty-one to fifteen.⁶

Mayor Christian Sonneveldt claimed that the reduced membership would promote greater efficiency but the ultimate reconstructed commission did not include any of the members who had voiced public opposition to the City Commission on the Campau housing issue.

The Commission Chairman, John W. Cumisky, strongly protested the numerical reduction on the grounds that it would

⁵"Orientation Handbook for New Members," Grand Rapids Human Relations Commission, May 6, 1963, Doc. File No. 8.

⁶Grand Rapids City Commission, Official Acts: April 27, 1965.

hurt seriously the overall effectiveness of the existing committee structure.⁷ He also protested to the Chairman of the City Ordinance Committee that the reduction was a "great mistake" and that he would be unwilling to serve on the Commission composed of only fifteen members.⁸ Several private agencies and groups supported Mr. Cummisky's position. The YWCA Public Affairs Committee accused the Mayor and City Commission of reducing membership in order to remove "controversial trouble-makers." The YWCA Committee stated that "commission members must be free to express their views without fear of dismissal" and that the City Commission used "undemocratic procedures" since the action had been taken without prior consultation with the Commission or its Chairman.⁹

Some members of the commission agreed with Mr. Cummisky and indicated they would not serve on a reduced Commission. Ultimately, each member had to decide whether to serve "under protest" in order to maintain continuity of Commission work or refuse to serve because of the principle involved. The members who agreed to Mayor Sonneveldt's personal request to continue in office for the good of the city at large did so only on a "conditional" basis until they could determine the effectiveness

⁷ John W. Cummisky, Letter to Mayor Christian Sonneveldt, April 30, 1965, Private papers of John W. Cummisky.

⁸ Ibid., Letter to Mr. Edward C. McCobb, May 12, 1965.

⁹ Frances E. Cobourn and Elizabeth D. Knapp, Chairmen, Public Affairs Committee, Y.W.C.A., Letter to Mayor C. H. Sonneveldt, May 17, 1965, Private papers of John W. Cummisky.

of a Commission so reduced in numbers. Dr. Douglas Hillman, an attorney, replaced Mr. Cummisky as Chairman.

The membership controversy illustrated the two divergent philosophies as to the purpose of the Commission and its role. The Commission members, and many community agencies, considered the Commission as an independent agency, separate and not responsible to the City Commission. The Mayor and City Commission considered the Human Relations Commission as an additional arm of city government, with a civil service Director responsible to the City Manager and advised but not controlled by a citizen committee. Both concepts had their origins in the enabling ordinance which made the Executive Director responsible to the Commission for action and to the City Manager for salary, promotions, and daily operations. This dual position forced Mr. Cowles and his successor to play a Janus role at all times.

The Community, too, was confused. Professor James McKee interviewed fifty prominent Negro leaders to evaluate the work of the Commission. Their responses clearly indicated that they felt the Commission "existed as a symbol and not as an effective agency."¹⁰

Mr. Cowles understood his dual role and attempted to maintain good relationships with all involved. As director he made frequent public speeches, conducted many counselling sessions

¹⁰Dr. James McKee, Institute for Community Development of Michigan State University, "Negro Leadership in Grand Rapids," Feb. 6, to May 28, 1962, Doc. File No. 48.

with individuals or groups, and provided service to all individuals who presented questions as to their rights and responsibilities by referring them to the proper authority or department. At the same time he expanded internal research on various inter-group problems to obtain facts for future action rather than suspicion or supposition. He requested and received additional budget funds for these reports. Thus he retained the confidence of both the City and Human Relations Commission.¹¹

During the summer of 1964 many cities experienced violent racial disturbances. Mr. Cowles claimed that the absence of interracial troubles in Grand Rapids was due to the "dedicated, trained professionals" in city government who promoted programs and activities which generated greater lines of communications among racial and religious groups. He believed that there had been considerable progress in the total community toward the elimination of mutual distrust, suspicion, or fear.¹²

Mr. Cowles' directorate was almost totally educationally orientated. He believed that through an effective educational program the Commission could "achieve equality of opportunity in housing, employment, public accommodations, and community

¹¹Alfred Cowles, "Report to the Human Relations Commission," Michigan Municipal Review, August, 1964, pp. 192-93.

¹²Alfred Cowles, "Developing Effective Human Relations Policies," Speech at International City Managers' Conference, Montreal, Canada, Sept. 21, 1965, Doc. File No. 91; See also: Alfred Cowles, "Specific Human Relations Programs," Nov. 23, 1965, Doc. File No. 90, and Annual Report, Grand Rapids Human Relations Commission, 1963-64, "Off. Files."

service for all citizens." However, the Commission solved few of the real problems; the mountain of education labored indeed but the mouse which was born was not prepared to provide positive action when necessary. The realities of racism in housing, employment, and schools still existed and no amount of "education" eradicated these realities. Only too often the "education" consisted of the "saved talking to the saved." The actuality of progressive de facto education was seldom mentioned. Not one piece of action legislation was proposed to the City Commission; housing developments in the inner city were still a decade away; ethnic racism was deep but no overt act had yet occurred to disturb the seemingly peaceful tone of the city. Subsequent events proved that education was not the panacea for all evils.

Although a few Commission members did not accept the concept of education as the total role of the Commission, most of them reflected their own middle-class background. Unfortunately, the Commission did not have among its members the younger, more militant and more disillusioned minority which more accurately reflected the general attitude of the depressed segment of the city's population. Few citizens of the Furniture City, with its many churches and schools, foresaw the potentialities of riot or physical disorder. The mountain of organization continued to labor, giving birth to more and more reports which were "received and filed."

By May, 1963, the staff had increased its work load tremendously and the appointment of an Assistant Executive Director

was imperative in spite of the two graduate students who were doing research in the office. The city budget had allocated funds for the Assistant Director and, normal Civil Service procedures having been followed, the City Commission appointed Mr. Roland Blanding, a graduate of Clark College, with prior experience working in the Southern Regional Council of Intergroup Relations and as Director of Community Services for the Urban League at Atlanta, Georgia.¹³ Mr. Joseph W. Adler replaced Mr. Blanding on August 21, 1965. A graduate of the University of Pittsburg, he had studied at Fisk University and served as Director of Investigation and Compliance for the Human Relations Commission of Erie, Pa.¹⁴ Among other duties, Mr. Adler assumed Mr. Cowles task as supervisor of Human Relations Clubs at various schools and acted as interim executive director when Mr. Cowles resigned.¹⁵

Mr. Cowles observed that Negro youth seldom took part in the various social programs available except for those who were in least need of help. The "hard-to-reach" youth, the actual or potential drop-out, seldom responded. Also, there was an extreme shortage of recreational activities available to the

¹³Grand Rapids Civil Service Commission, Personal Records: Mr. Roland Blanding; See also: "Off. Min.," Nov. 7, 1963, May 27, 1965.

¹⁴Ibid., Personal Records: Mr. Joseph W. Adler.

¹⁵Alfred Cowles, "Job Responsibilities for HRC Assistant," Letter to Joseph W. Adler, Aug. 23, 1965, "Off. Files": Joseph W. Adler.

Negro youth, many of whom were poorly adjusted to urban living and constantly exposed to the conspicuous rewards of illegal activities. The Negro church leaders had tried and failed to develop in this ever increasing group a respect for law and order and the value of education. Many of these young Blacks suffered deepseated hostilities and serious emotional conflicts.¹⁶

Dr. James McKee of Michigan State University, Mr. Henry Holstege of Calvin College and Mrs. Hillary Bissell, with the support of the Education Committee, suggested holding a youth conference of selected individuals from the core area in order to obtain new insights into the attitudes, problems, and needs felt by the youth themselves. Mr. Richard Moore, a Negro graduate working under Dr. McKee at MSU was employed during the summer of 1961 as supervisor at Campau Pool, located in the area of the lower socio-economic minority peoples. Mr. Moore invited forty-two young people to participate in a picnic-conference at Townsend Park. Many of the youth had been "in trouble" with the police and all were classified as potential delinquents by virtue of social environment and family background. Some were school drop-outs; all were potential drop-outs but none were seriously disturbed or aggressively anti-social youths. Dr. McKee and Mr. Moore and four members of the Education Committee conducted the "conference," during which the youths answered some prepared questions with

¹⁶Hillary Bissell, "Tentative Proposal for Developing a Program to Meet the Needs of the Negro Youth," June 1, 1961, Doc. File No. 40.

great honesty and frankness. Many stated they missed classes frequently; few had aspirations to professional employment but hoped for government jobs, beautician work, or work in the construction trades. Most of the youth realized that the "color bar" would probably prohibit the actual realization of their ambitions. They complained of "police intimidation," lack of adequate recreational facilities, and poor houses. Only a few expressed a general dislike for school and gave as reasons for leaving school prior to graduation the alleged prejudice of teachers, economic needs of the family, or, with the girls, early pregnancy.¹⁷

The success of the picnic-conference was judged adequate enough to warrant its being held yearly until 1966. The Education Committee recommended, based on the students' requests, that a serious need existed for a place to hold dances within the ghetto area. The Committee further recommended that more professional help be made available to the youth, along with more positive action on the part of social and church agencies. The recommendations were "received and filed."

The Education Committee requested Mr. Raymond Boozer from the Board of Education staff to respond to the statements of the youth and to discuss the overall school policies with the committee. Mr. Boozer claimed that for the school year 1961-62, 1,155

¹⁷Summary Report of the First Teen-Age Picnic and Conference," Sept. 16, 1961, Doc. File No. 40.

prospective teachers were interviewed, 150 eventually hired, fifteen (10%) of whom were non-white. Few qualified non-whites made application although the authorized starting salary (\$4,400) was competitive with other school systems in western Michigan. The local colleges, Aquinas and Calvin, supplied about one-fifth of the new teachers. Every high school had non-white teachers assigned, including the two which had all white student populations. Generally teachers were assigned according to their indicated preference, proper consideration being given to their professional training, grade, and subject area of specialization without regard to race.¹⁸

Subsequently, at Mr. Boozer's suggestion, the education committee next met with Mr. Donald Fink, Pupil-Personnel Director. Mr. Fink stated that all the secondary schools had full-time counsellors and Junior College part-time counsellors. The existing ratio, inadequate because of budget limitations, was one counsellor for every five hundred students. Since all counsellors were instructed to assume that every student was going to college, vocational and personal counselling was nearly non-existent and children from the lower-socio-economic background received minimal attention. The Education Committee undertook no courageous remedial avenues of correction on information received from either Mr. Boozer or Mr. Fink.¹⁹

¹⁸Ed. Com. Min., Dec 13, 1961.

¹⁹Ibid., Jan. 23, 1962.

Mr. Bernard Kennedy, Director of Industrial Arts and Vocational Training met next with the committee. He did not know the number of non-white students in his program and believed that even obtaining these figures would constitute "Preferential treatment" and would be unfair to the white students. He further stated that there were no plans for a separate vocational school or separation of vocational students from the regular students. Davis Technical High School had been closed years previously when it became a "dumping" ground for backward, undesirable, or hard-to-teach students with consequent destruction of the vocational training program.²⁰ All in all, the Youth Conference resulted in the Education Committee becoming better informed on school policies and operations but no change in the programs of education.

One direct result of the Youth Conference and the meetings of Board of Education staff members was the formation of Human Relations Clubs in the schools to encourage potential drop-outs to remain in school until graduation. The pilot club in South High School where the drop-out percentage was the highest was begun by Mr. Cowles. The students with help from Mr. Cowles and two commission members drew up their own by-laws which admitted both white and non-white students currently enrolled in classes. The major emphasis was placed on education and interracial programs and excluded purely social activities such as parties

²⁰Ibid., June 6, 1962.

or dances. Later similar clubs developed at Ottawa High School and several elementary schools and all remained active and productive until the departure of Mr. Cowles when they fell apart because of lack of leadership and direction. Most interesting was the fact that no active member of any of the clubs left school during the club's existence. One or more members of the Education Committee attended each meeting.²¹

The Education Committee met with ten principals from inner-city schools to receive a special report on the education of the culturally deprived children. Dr. Joseph McMillan, Principal of the Sheldon School, reported the findings of the "Principals' Report" which indicated that former comfortable, middle class student populations were changing into a low socioeconomic population. The report indicated that the core area schools were over-crowded and under-staffed and that the teachers themselves had not recognized the critical transition until the change was well under way. Children lived in two separate cultures, that of the underprivileged home and that of the middle-class orientated classroom. Children who were accustomed to foul language and the sight of adult sex play in the home had to work with horrified and dismayed teachers brought up in entirely different moral value environments. Many teachers became

²¹Ibid., Jan. 18, 1963; See also: "Human Relations Clubs--Regulations," HRC "Off. Files."

frustrated by what they knew intellectually but could not accept emotionally.²²

The "Principals' Report" contained several specific recommendations, including the lowering of the student-teacher ratio, the extensive use of "teacher aids" (classroom assistants who could maintain discipline and order while the teacher worked directly with a few students), greater flexibility in the school curriculum and ungraded classes. The School Superintendent and the Board of Education had praised the report highly but rejected all the recommendations because of the cost factor and the obvious conflict of the recommendations with the Neighborhood School concept in which universal rules applied to all schools equally and without exception. Dr. McMillan and his associates hoped the Human Relations Commission could help bring about some implementation of the recommendations but received only more praise and no help. The Commission directed Mr. Cowles to approach the Grand Rapids Foundation for money to put some or all the suggested programs into operation. The Foundation gave "sympathetic consideration" but no funds and there were no Federal grants available at this time.²³

The following spring Dr. Jay Pylman, Deputy Superintendent of Schools, asked for the Human Relations Commission's support for

²²Ibid., Jan. 18, March 19 & June 6, 1963; See also: "Principals' Report," Contained in Ed. Com., "Off. Min.," June 6, 1963.

²³Ibid., June 6, Sept. 11, 1963.

an appeal for an additional four mill tax for "Project Q," "quality" education. The Commission refused to go on record in support of the millage increase unless the Board of Education publicly promised that a portion of the increased school revenue would be allocated to accomplish some designated portions of the "Principals' Report." The Board of Education agreed and Commission members took an active part in the campaign.²⁴

When the citizens rejected the request for additional millage for "Project Q," a second campaign asked for three mills rather than four. Since this second request included no mention of the "Principals' Report," the Commission refused support and only when the Board of Education promised to allocate a specific amount to "some portions" of the report did the Commission pass a "Resolution of Endorsement." This millage received citizens' approval. In both elections the news media noted the action of the HRC but in neither case indicated the Commissions' position had any major effect on the outcome of the election. Far more important to the success of the three mill request was the threat of the Board of Education to curtail or even eliminate the Band and Athletic programs.

One immediate result was the appointment of Mrs. Jacquelyn Nickerson as Corrdinator of the Culturally Deprived Program of the Board of Education. Mrs. Nickerson was the first non-white to hold an official administrative position in the city's public

²⁴Ibid., March 26, 1964; See also: Exec. Com., "Off. Min.," June 22, and July 11, 1964.

schools. She quickly began a pre-kindergarten for four year old children at the Franklin School, which, if successful, would be expanded to other schools. She projected a special eight week summer-school program for slow learners within the inner city for grades one through six to provide a continuity of learning.

Special coaching teachers were recruited to aid the regular teacher and to lower student-teacher ratio. In conjunction with the Commission, she planned inservice training programs for all teachers assigned to the eleven schools officially designated and identified in the "Principals' Report" as being "culturally deprived."²⁵

While the Commission prided itself on being instrumental in effecting some of the recommendations contained in the report, accurate assessment of its role was impossible. The Board of Education realized the necessity of appeasement of the minority groups to obtain their votes. Moreover, the major portion of the report was not implemented until federal money became available under the provisions of the Office of Economic Opportunity.

Despite study by the Commission and action by the school administration, the plight of minority children grew worse. A commission study revealed that less than half of the beginning, non-white high school students reached senior classification and less than 40% graduated. Because finances, rather than racial problems, appeared to be the chief reason for leaving school, education seemed less important than the improvement of employment

²⁵Ibid., Jan. 6, 1965.

opportunities.²⁶ The Education Committee, in conjunction with the Superintendent of Schools, sponsored a community-wide conference to provide parents of potential drop-out students with reasons and motivations for urging their children to complete the full high school educational program.

The full Commission made a post-mortem evaluation of the "Drop-out Conference" of October, 1963. They agreed that the program was of extremely high quality and a total failure. The program attracted many teachers and school officials but less than fifty parents, most of whom did not have potentially dropout children. The parents from the lower socio-economic groups whom the committee wanted to reach could not attend since it was held on a Saturday when the parents were working and in a most fashionable church in the center of town where the intended participants would feel the most uncomfortable. Moreover, parents were not contacted directly or through the schools nor was transportation provided. The entire program was geared too high educationally to be meaningful to the parents having little formal education. Finally, the entire day was in fact aimed at a white, upper-middle class audience of reformers and offered no really practical answers as to how concerned parents might influence their children to remain in school until graduation.²⁷ The only positive result was that the Committee learned what not to do in the future. The

²⁶Daniel L. Groce, "The High School Leaver," Doc. File No. 47.

²⁷Ed. Com., "Off. Min.," June 6, and Dec. 4, 1963.

committee immediately scheduled a series of similar conferences to be held in the evenings, in school or church auditoriums within the inner city, using local speakers known to the community.

The first local dropout conference was held at South High School, April 30, 1964, with clergymen and school administrators urging parents to attend. Despite a heavy snow storm, many of the hitherto "unreached" parents attended and personally expressed their approval of the program. However, congested school programs forced the postponement of five additional programs until the following fall. In fact, the subsequent programs never took place and the official records fail to explain why. It would appear that the Committee became involved in other projects and thereby permitted an excellent and effective program to die.²⁸

The Commission staff prepared a follow-up drop-out report which indicated that "dire financial troubles in the family" was not the major factor in causing school drop-out. Mr. Groce's earlier report had depended almost entirely on his contacts with parents whereas the students supplied the information of the new study. The students claimed that the unfavorable parental attitudes towards the school often reflected the parents feeling of inferiority, inadequacy, or distrust of the school and used it as the scapegoat for the failure of their children. The drop-outs themselves were neither hypercritical of the school or unduly influenced by their peers to leave school.

²⁸ Ibid., May 21, 1964.

The Grand Rapids Ministerial Association began a program at the First Methodist Church, and St. Paul's Methodist Church to combat the drop-out program by providing a tutorial service to students without charge. Necessary instruction was provided by teachers, college students, members of the high school "Future Teachers" Clubs. Rev. James D. Cochran of St. Paul's Methodist Church requested the Commission to help obtain additional teachers and greater publicity. Mr. Cowles arranged for excellent coverage in the city's news media and the commission members obtained a sufficient number of teachers to enable seven additional units to be opened. Subsequent evaluations with teachers and principals indicated the program was an unqualified success. However, the Commission did not originate or conduct the program in any way but merely aided its growth and development.²⁹

The controversial question of de facto segregation arose again in the summer and fall of 1964 when the NAACP took the position that segregated education was necessarily inferior and wanted the Board of Education to undertake widespread bussing of non-white students out of the core area schools. The Education Committee did not support the principle of bussing but did commit itself to a policy of "open enrollment in under-utilized schools." The Commission as a whole rejected the position of the Education Committee since some members favored the NAACP "Resolution." Ultimately the Commission went on record supporting the complete

²⁹Ibid., Dec. 4, 1963, May 21, 1964.

"Resolution" but added the Commission's reaffirmation of support of the Neighborhood School Concept and suggested the transportation of children from the inner city to outside under-utilized schools to be the responsibility of the parents rather than the Board of Education. The uncertain position of the Commission was not approved by many local civil rights groups and the NAACP which felt that the Commission had forfeited any support by minority peoples. Certainly the Commission's "Resolution and Comment" did not reflect a new or courageous position but rather old line traditionalism.³⁰

During the summer of 1974 there was a marked increase in the number of complaints of vandalism and rowdyism involving non-white youths in the city parks. Representatives of the Commission, The Park Recreational Department, and two City Commissioners met with representatives of teen-aged groups from Franklin, Madison and Campau Parks. From these meetings was born the city's "Big Brother" program through which youth received individual and specialized guidance service through direct contact with a mature and competent adult. The Commission and staff persuaded some fifty men to participate in the program and orientation sessions were held to explain the procedures and goals. The "Big Brother" worked directly with the youngsters on matters of employment, family and environment, education or training programs, and church and community activities. By mid-August twenty-one adults had volunteered and by October there were fifty volunteers. These

³⁰Ibid., May 21, 1964; See also: Exec. Min., July 13, 1964.

professional and business men spent a minimum of an hour a week with their anti-social teenager and the program proved to be a bulwark against the continuation of large scale juvenile delinquency especially in the city parks near the ghetto.³¹ Ultimately the program became too large for the commission staff to handle adequately and was taken over by the United Community Services of Grand Rapids which had the manpower and the money required for its continuance and growth.³²

Two serious incidents involving alleged racial discrimination accompanied the opening of the school year in September, 1965. One Negro mother charged that the administration and staff of Catholic Central High School discriminated in admissions, student assignment, selection of cheer-leaders, and conduct of athletic programs. The news media gave the accusation considerable publicity but a special ad hoc committee of the Commission found no evidence to support any of these accusations. The charge was not renewed but the administrative staff of the school was angered that it received no prime time coverage in the press to balance the attention given to the original charge.³³

³¹Ibid., Sept. 8, 1964; See also: Alfred E. Cowles, "Letters to Negro Clergy and Community Leaders," June 30, 1964; Cowles: "Philosophy of 'Big Brother' Programs," Aug. 18, 1964; John W. Cumisky, "Letter to John G. Prickett, Chamber of Commerce," Oct. 26, 1964; Doc. File No. 39.

³²HRC, "Off. Files": Big Brother Program.

³³"Off. Min.," Sept. 30, 1965. (Minutes of this date contain the complete report of the Ad Hoc Investigation of Discrimination at Catholic Central High School.)

A far more serious problem arose when a Negro student in one of the public secondary schools attacked and beat a teacher. The student was apprehended, turned over to the police, brought to court, found guilty and sentenced and placed in jail all in a matter of a very few hours. The news media in general condemned the action of the school and court because of the speed involved and because the school authorities ordered that the youth must be permanently excluded from any future attendance in any public school. The School Superintendent, Dr. Jay Pylman, asked the Human Relations Commission not to concern itself with the incident since it had been resolved by the court. The Commission agreed but requested that in the future the Superintendent refer all accused to the professional staff for counselling prior to court action. The Commission further requested that the student now in jail "be given as much professional help as is available towards his rehabilitation" and towards completion of his high school requirements. The same communication stated that the Education Committee was "both impressed and pleased by the cooperation of the Board of Education" and reaffirmed its readiness to continue to work with the Board.³⁴

While these two incidents greatly enhanced the position of the Commission with the official educational bodies they definitely did not advance the Commission's image with the non-white population. In both incidents minority citizens believed that the

³⁴Ed. Com., "Off. Min.," Dec. 2, 1965, Jan. 13, 1966.

Commission had acted to please the existing power structure; that the Commission attempted to preserve the status quo and had done little or nothing to control, or seriously influence, the handling of racially tense events by the news media.³⁵

At the same time the Commission was taking no action whatsoever to assist the five thousand Spanish-speaking people of the city many of whom were having serious problems in education, employment, and police relations. Mr. Vargas, Chairman of a special ad hoc committee to study the conditions, reported that the situation was becoming progressively worse. The City employed no Spanish speaking personnel and apparently maintained a dual system of justice within the Police Department. The Education Committee recommended the preparation of a booklet printed in English and Spanish listing all the available social resources of the city and that the city hire a Spanish-speaking individual for translation duties. The first was ignored and the second denied by the Civil Service Director since facility in a foreign language was not a part of any normal "job specification" falling under the jurisdiction of Civil Service. It was not until May, 1965, that Mr. Vargas was appointed as official city interpreter on a per diem basis. He could devote an average of ten hours a week to the task, too few to satisfy all the needs.³⁶

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., June 28, 1962, June 27, 1965; See also: "Special Sub-Committee Report on Latin American Problems," Aug. 17, 1962 and Daniel Vargas, "War on Poverty," Doc. File No. 49.

The Education Committee continued to pay the expenses annually of two police officers attending the Police Institute at Michigan State University. All officers who attended praised the institute in their formal reports and reported that they, and the department, benefited greatly from the exposure to the extremely high professional standards and quality of the instructors in the program.³⁷ Mr. Cowles continued to conduct inservice training classes for all recruits and for many regular members of the Police Department. He warned the officers that they brought to their work all prior attitudes and prejudices that could interfere with the rights to equality before the law. This required each officer to act with calm and impartial judgment in areas of tension and stress which could only be accomplished if there was confidence by the people that the police had the ability to act without prejudice.³⁸

Mr. Cowles pointed out that international tensions and domestic intergroup frictions increasingly complicated the task of the police officer and that the nightmare of "RIOT," with its brutal, evil, and long lasting aftermath, was a constant threat. He believed, however, that riots were always preceded by observable signs which "alert and sensitive officers" should be able to recognize. There was, he concluded, no threat of riot in Grand

³⁷ Doc. File No. 43 contains all material available on the M.S.U. Police Training Institute relative to the Grand Rapids Police Department.

³⁸ Alfred E. Cowles, "Address to Recruit Training Class," Feb. 7, 1962, Doc. File No. 44a.

Rapids. He warned officers to avoid stereotyped thinking along the lines of "We" and "They" in which generalized rumors emphasized the "criminality, sexual depravity, or diabolical design" of such. Since police were constantly involved with the "weak, maladjusted and frustrated members of society who were represented disproportionately by members of minority groups," they tended to conclude that all members of the minority group were potential law breakers or troublemakers. This unjust attitude ignored the inequities existing in housing, employment, and education which frustrated the total group. Non-whites considered the Negro who accepted this inevitability of inferiority as "Uncle Toms" while the white citizens generally considered any Negro who did not accept this inevitability as a "trouble maker."³⁹

The inservice training program produced good and effective lines of communication between the Commission and the Police Department. Each complaint of "police brutality" or "discrimination" was given to the Superintendent of Police for investigation and final disposition. All information or action taken was reported back to the Commission. The success of the indoctrination program encouraged Mr. Cowles to recommend a similar program for all personnel of the City Hall but no action was ever taken by the City Manager.⁴⁰

³⁹ Alfred E. Cowles, Lecture: "Grand Rapids Police Department," March 20-22, 1962, Doc. File No. 19.

⁴⁰ Alfred E. Cowles, "Ten Commandments of Racial Courtesy," May 20, 1965, Doc. File No. 85.

The Commission, in conjunction with the Urban League and Aquinas and Calvin Colleges, presented a "Crime Prevention Institute" in an attempt to arrive at some "positive Community approaches to reduce crime." The Grand Rapids Foundation financed a project to tabulate all adult criminal arrests for the year 1960. The report indicated that whereas the non-white population over seventeen years of age was only four percent of the total population, the non-white arrests constituted nearly 25%. Other than this arrest analysis data, the Crime Institute had little or no positive data on which to proceed.⁴¹

In the summer following the "Crime Institute" (1965), California's Watts uprising shocked the nation. A local station, WOOD-TV, produced a local documentary to determine reactions to events which had taken place on the West Coast. Since many local citizens made comments on police brutality, the management of WOOD-TV invited Mr. Cowles to respond publicly. Mr. Cowles accepted the invitation and stated that thorough and impartial investigation of the local police department did not substantiate any of the verbal allegations made against local police personnel. Mr. Cowles claimed that some of the interviewees had had previous police records and, therefore, a negative attitude towards the police. Rev. W. L. Patterson, Pastor of the True Light Baptist Church, the largest Negro Church in the city, confirmed Mr. Cowles'

⁴¹"Crime Prevention Institute," Aquinas College, Nov. 4, 1964, Doc. File No. 75; See also: "Supplementary Data, Crime Prevention Institute," Doc. File No. 75.

statements. Police Chief Johnston added his agreement but pointed out the disturbing fact that only one Negro had been added to the police department within the previous ten years. Over the air Chief Johnston urged more qualified young Negroes to apply for positions.⁴²

During the five years of Cowles administration the Education Committee produced some positive and some negative results. The most successful programs were the Annual Youth Conferences, the school related Human Relations Clubs, and the Big Brother program. Positive and effective lines of communication had been established with the school system. The "tutorial" program had been successful although with little assistance from the Commission. Finally, the success of the recruit and inservice training program for police officers had created excellent relations with that branch of city government.

The failures of the Commission were equally obvious. No contact had yet been made with the non-public school systems which educated 40% of the students of the city. The Committee fully endorsed the "Principals' Report" but few of the ideas contained therein ever blossomed into reality. Even the modified "blackmail" of the Board of Education on the millage issue failed to produce major change and the Commission did not press with vigor for reforms. No change had been effected in the Neighborhood School concept and the advocating of "open bussing" had proven

⁴²Alfred E. Cowles, Television Address, Oct. 21, 1965, Doc. File No. 74; See also: HRC, "Off. Min.," March 26, 1965.

to be a conspicuous failure. The school incidents had seriously damaged the public image of the Commission and there was near complete failure to solve the problems of the Spanish-speaking Americans. Finally, the cooperation and work with the Police Department tended to identify the Commission in the eyes of the minorities as part of the "establishment."

The Education Committee labored strenuously for five years and perfected a mountain of organization and paper work. It did not concentrate an action programs relative to de facto segregation and the over-crowded conditions of the classrooms. The Committee began no program to correct possible or actual inferior instructional levels within the core area schools; nor did the Committee permit itself to get involved in the teacher assignment difficulty. The peripheral issues, not the real and major issues, received considerable attention. It must be noted, however, that the City Government, the Board of Education, and the public in general were complacent. Almost no one anticipated that in this "City of Schools and Churches" any racial disturbance was possible, much less imminent. There was little, if any, interest or demand for change and the Human Relations Commission was dominated by the attitude generally prevailing in the city itself: "Don't Rock the Boat."

Throughout the entire period of Mr. Cowles' directorate the staff performed the duties of the Employment Committee. A study prepared by a staff intern from Aquinas College indicated that only 124 non-white students had graduated from high school

in 1960 and 1961; 35% of the graduates went to college and 25% failed to make a good adjustment to life following graduation. Five Negro young women had employment other than service work, three as sales clerks and two as nurses aids.⁴³ A second study of an equal number of white high school graduates for the same years indicated that Negro graduates experienced greater difficulties in obtaining gainful employment, received fewer white collar positions, and had higher unemployment prospects. The completed studies resulted in no action on the part of the Commission.⁴⁴

⁴³Charles Sims, "Non-white Student Employment Survey, 1960-61," May, 1962, Doc. File No. 51.

⁴⁴Charles Sims, "Caucasian Student Employment Survey, Class of 1960 and 1961," Sept., 1962, Doc. File No. 51.

<u>Graduate</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Non-White</u>
Working	50	32
Average Salary	\$63.28	\$42.50
College	51	44
Military Service	10	12
Unemployed	7	24
Married (girls only)	6	12
Total Students Surveyed	124	124

CHAPTER X

A PLACE TO LIVE

Housing conditions continued to deteriorate during the Cowles directorate in direct proportion to the increase of the Black population by natural rate and by migration from the deep South, especially Mississippi, Alabama and Arkansas. The Housing Committee was extremely active during all this period but there was for all practical purpose no Negro dispersion in the city. As of June, 1959, only thirty-two non-white families lived outside the existing ghetto area; fourteen of these families had lived in one house for twenty years or more and only nine families had moved into hitherto all white areas in the previous three years.¹

The Housing Committee placed primary responsibility for lack of dispersal on the Grand Rapids Real Estate Board (GRREB) which handled about 95% of the housing transactions and the secondary responsibility on the white community's objection to the principle of "open housing." This objection was based on the general fear that property value declined whenever Negroes moved into all white territories. Various studies, such as the

¹Rodger Rice and Harold Wiersma, "Scatterization of Negroes in Grand Rapids," June, 1959, Doc. File No. 60A.

Laurenti Report previously mentioned, proved this belief was false but white property owners persisted in their beliefs. A confidential report for Commission members only indicated that the average market value of property in hitherto all white areas not immediately contiguous to the existing ghetto showed "an upward trend after entry" when sold to Negroes.²

A study of Negro housing in the city indicated that eight percent of the population were Negroes. They occupied 6.7 percent of the city's housing units, but one-quarter of which the Inspection Department classified as deteriorated. The ghetto contained 30% of all dilapidated dwelling units as well as the same percentage of all over-crowded units. Fifty-five percent of ghetto dwellings were rental units as compared to less than 35% outside the ghetto. This report assumed, but contained no empirical evidence substantiating evidence, that poor housing conditions naturally increased the problems of health, crime, education, and employment.³

A survey of 768 families living immediately south of the ghetto indicated that 25% were planning to move because of Negro encroachment. Most disturbing was the fact that real estate agents had contacted 120 families and urged them to sell because of the potential decline in property values. The Commission

²"A Report of the Housing, Health, and Welfare Committee" (Confidential), August, 1961, Doc. File No. 61.

³Robert A. Fles, "Towards Understanding the Racial Problem in Grand Rapids," May 8, 1961, Doc. File No. 61.

believed non-white movement into the area was inevitable and no stabilization program was possible in this contiguous area.⁴

The Housing Committee planned a campaign for city wide open housing. With the assistance of the Ministerial Alliance and the Civil Rights Commission, and anticipating the centennial of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, the Committee hoped to obtain ten thousand signatures to a petition affirming belief in freedom of residence. Mayor Stanley J. Davis proclaimed the entire month of February, traditionally devoted to Negro History and brotherhood, as "Good Neighbor Month" and clergymen throughout the city stressed in their sermons the evils of interracial isolation. The campaign was officially pronounced a success although no actual tabulation of the total number of signatures was ever made.⁵

Mr. L. W. Schultz, President of GRREB, and a few of the directors of the organization met with the housing committee on Oct. 31, 1962. This led to future meetings which included members of the NAACP and the Urban League. In November, 1962, the Board incorporated into its official policies a statement of non-discrimination for real estate sales. It claimed this as the first such written agreement between an official city agency and a

⁴Hous. Com., "Off. Min.," Feb. 6, March 6, March 15, 1962; See also: Herman Bordewyk, "Housing Survey," 1962, Doc. File No. 61.

⁵Ibid., June 5, Nov. 11, 1962, March 4, 1963; See also: Mayor Stanley J. Davis, "Good Neighbor Proclamation," Feb. 4, 1963, Doc. File No. 76.

local Real Estate Board ever to be signed in the United States. The policy was binding on all the 155 brokers and 455 salesmen affiliated with GRREB.⁶

This cooperation between GRREB and the Commission was severely tested in the new housing development begun in the extreme north-west part of the city. Four Negroes purchased twenty acres of land from the City of Grand Rapids separated by three miles from the existing ghetto for development of an open housing unit. The city rejected the first bid of the "Auburn Hills Corporation" of \$20,500 for this property located at Fuller and Sweet Avenues and established a minimum price for the land at \$54,250. Dr. Julius Franks, Jr., spokesman of the corporation, submitted a second bid of \$60,000 which, after much delay, the city accepted. White residents of the area immediately instituted suit in the Superior Court on the grounds that the City Commission had set this land aside in 1950 as a future park site in the master plan for recreational development.⁷

A few white home owners of the area formed an organization and met with the Housing Committee on Dec. 10, 1962. They petitioned the Committee to try to persuade Dr. Franks and his associates to withdraw their proposal on the grounds that the

⁶ Alfred E. Cowles, Letter to Mr. Schultz, President, GRREB, July 31, 1962, "Off. Files;" See also: House. Com., "Off. Min.," Aug. 27, Oct. 25, & Nov. 15, 1962; "GRREB Position," Dec. 10, 1962, Doc. File No. 9; Alfred E. Cowles, Letter to Mr. L. W. Schultz, President, GRREB, Dec. 13, 1962, Doc. File No. 42.

⁷ Grand Rapids Press, Aug. 20, 1963.

advent of non-whites into the area would seriously depress surrounding property values and result in panic selling. They further claimed that two City Commissioners of the Second Ward, Mrs. Evangeline Lamberts and Mr. Robert Jamo, had agreed that signing of final papers should be delayed until all the legal questions had been resolved. The Housing Committee refused to take any action until all questions of legality of land sales were concluded.⁸

Commissioners Lamberts and Jamo met with the Housing Committee and, while admitting the right of Negroes to purchase the land, suggested that public support was mandatory for the success of the project. Mr. Jamo questioned the sociological desirability of the project and the financial stability of the corporation; Mrs. Lamberts was concerned about the tension and dissatisfaction she had observed among white home owners in the area. She also suggested that if Dr. Frank's group withdrew its bid, the Board of Education might purchase the land for the construction of a new Junior High School. Mr. Jamo suggested that the City Commission conduct a full and thorough study of the project prior to signing final papers. The Housing Committee rejected all the suggestions and severely criticized both Commissioners for harming the cause of human relations through their support of the white residents of the area.⁹

⁸Hous. Com., "Off. Min.," Dec. 10, 1962.

⁹Ibid., Dec. 26, 1962.

Three weeks later, Dr. Franks and his associates presented for adoption by the Committee a draft of "Declaration of Policy of the Housing Committee," declaring that the Commission by ordinance had the obligation to combat all aspects of prejudice and discrimination in sale, lease, rental, and financing of non-white housing. The Declaration further stated that segregated housing patterns had resulted in substandard and overcrowded living conditions and had increased mortality, crime, disease, vice, juvenile delinquency and dangerous intergroup tensions. Housing segregation produced educational segregation in opposition to the provisions of the Federal Constitution. The Declaration concluded by committing the Commission to the promotion of equal opportunity in housing, renting, and purchasing homes or land for residential purposes and helping minority groups to obtain credit and mortgage financing.¹⁰

In that meeting Dr. Franks severely criticized the Commission for not publicly supporting his project previously and for its failure to make a public statement after meeting with Commissioners Lamberts and Jamo condemning their suggestions. Commission Chairman, Mr. Cummisky, replied that the Commission wished to remain neutral and thereby preserve its role as a mediator for conciliation. He added that the Commission would defend the right of any group to purchase land anywhere in the city. Other Commissioners remained relatively silent.¹¹

¹⁰Dr. Julius Franks, "Statement of Objections," Jan. 15, 1963, Contained in Hous. Com., "Off. Min.," Jan. 15, 1963.

¹¹Ibid.

Mr. Cowles believed that in view of the tense situation professional guidance and counsel was advisable. He brought to the city for two days Mr. Morris Milgram, who as Executive Director of the Modern Community Developers, Philadelphia, Pa., had been successful in promoting integrated housing programs. To Dr. Franks and his associates, members of the City Commission, and the Housing Committee, Mr. Milgram expressed conviction that the Auburn Hills Corporation could succeed and did not believe it would be the forerunner of another Negro ghetto community. Mr. Milburn was very amazed and pleased with the GRREB (1962) statement on open housing.¹²

Subsequently Milgram suggested in a communication to the Commission that a 70% white quota system be established in the Auburn Hills Corporation but this proved to be financially impossible and the ratio was rejected. Fifty prominent citizens were contacted to raise the balance of money due on the land purchase and the city officially turned over the property title to the corporation. By 1968 the project was about half completed with nearly 70% of the homeowners Black and all but three or four were middle class and professional people.

The Franks, or Auburn Hills, project had two important results. The first was the development and eventual adoption by the City Commission of an Open Housing Ordinance. A joint

¹²Alfred E. Cowles, Letter to Mr. Morris Milgram, Jan. 11, 1963; HRC, "Off. Files": Franks Development, Doc. File No. 101A.

committee of HRC and GRREB members began its study and presented it to the City Commission in July. After a public hearing in which many civic spokesmen endorsed the ordinance with only a few individual real estate brokers in opposition, the City Commission unanimously passed the Fair Housing Ordinance on December 23, 1963.¹³

The 1963 Fair Housing Ordinance made it illegal to refuse to sell, rent, finance, or construct multiple housing accommodations because of "race, color, religion, national origin or ancestry." However, it carefully exempted the people most likely to oppose such an ordinance. One could discriminate in duplexes in which the owner did not live and apartments with up to six units in which the owner did live. Since there were very few apartments in Grand Rapids, the number of dwelling units which were not exempted in the "multiple Housing accommodations" clause was extremely small. In the joint committee's discussion the HRC representatives had usually sought smaller exclusions. It was the City Commission rather than the joint committee that raised the number from four to six units.¹⁴

The ordinance delegated to the Human Relations Commission the responsibility to investigate all violation complaints, effect conciliation, and if necessary, hold public hearings to determine if the ordinance was being violated. When conciliation was

¹³Hous. Com., "Off. Min.," May 17, June 15, July 16, Oct. 24, and Dec. 24, 1963; See also: "Statement on Housing Ordinance," Dec. 11, 1963, Doc. File No. 3.

¹⁴City Ordinance, No. 1628, Dec. 23, 1963, Doc. File No. 1.

impossible, the complaint was turned over to the City Attorney for possible prosecution in court. Convicted violators were subject to fines or imprisonment.¹⁵

Henceforth no real estate agent could refuse to show any house or apartment listed for occupancy and minority persons could demand to view listed vacancies. The chief and almost immediate result was a movement of Black families into the area east and south of the ghetto. Most dwellings in both areas were single family, two or three bedroom homes, less than forty years old. The ordinance forced no one to sell or rent if he made the sale privately but, once placed on the multiple listings of all real estate agents, the owner could not restrict anyone from occupation. Real estate agents soon realized the ordinance relieved them of the stigma of prejudice since they could and did bring prospective occupants to inspect any listed dwelling. If the owner refused to deal with potential occupants by removing the dwelling from the multiple listings, the agent was not responsible.

Time proved the victory was far from complete. The Commission had no enforcement powers, merely investigatory authority. The ordinance did not compel alleged violators to give testimony. By the time a complaint was heard and turned over to the City Attorney for action, the house or apartment in question in most instances had been sold or rented to some one other than the original complaintant. In such a proven case of discrimination

¹⁵Ibid.

little could be done. At best, the ordinance proved to be a psychological victory which laid the ground work for a really effective ordinance on open housing to be passed at a later date.

Because of the publicity given to the ordinance, the Commission prepared a four page brochure, "Your Choice in Housing," distributing it through schools and churches. It sketched the history of the ordinance, explained its basic provisions in simple terms, and outlined the procedure to file complaints for alleged violations. The last page contained some "Myths Regarding Housing," such as the assumed decline of property values when a non-white moved on a block or that Black families did not keep up their homes or grounds properly.¹⁶

A second major achievement of the Commission was its establishment of neighborhood stabilization programs. The first successful project of this nature centered around Dr. Frank's Auburn Hills project which brought non-whites into an all white neighborhood for the first time. In the Huff area bordering the area on the west several white residents complained of the "Block Busting" tactics being used by some real estate salesmen and requested that the Commission help in preventing panic selling with its consequent depression of local property values.¹⁷

The Commission Staff assisted the residents of the Huff area to form a neighborhood council. By April, 1964, the Huff

¹⁶Human Relations Commission, "Myths Regarding Housing," Doc. File No. 1.

¹⁷HRC, "Off. Min.," Dec. 13, 1963.

Northeast Community Club had over five hundred members who met at small block meetings, with Commission staff members attending, to discourage panic selling and to urge the citizens to report immediately any real estate agent preaching the doctrine. Rumors were publicized and usually dispelled. Local religious leaders, educators, PTA members, labor representatives and business and governmental officials were involved whenever possible or necessary. "NOT FOR SALE" signs appeared in prominent places on homes or property. The result was even greater than anticipated. Not only did panic selling come to an abrupt halt, but there was a general improvement made to home and property in the area indicating pride of residence and a determination to remain.¹⁸

The group eventually drew up a constitution for Huff Good Neighbors United which defined aims, objectives and geographical limitations setting dues at a dollar per year per person. Most important, as the non-white residents began moving into the new Auburn Hill Corporation, no overt confrontation took place and, at the same time, there was no depressing of property values in the Huff area.¹⁹

A second Neighborhood Council was established contiguous to the north east section of the established ghetto. Several instructors from Aquinas and Calvin Colleges lived in this area

¹⁸Hous. Com., "Off. Min.," April 10, 1964; See also: "Guidelines for Promotion of Integration and Stabilization of Neighborhoods" (No date--circa May, 1964), Doc. File No. 50.

¹⁹Ibid.

and noticed an exceptionally high number of "For Sale" signs indicating a general fear on the part of property owners that a Negro migration would result in rapid depreciation of property value. The Commission discovered that some real estate dealers were employing pressure tactics amid widespread rumors of police failure to control racial incidents. The Commission staff, with assistance from the personnel of the Sigsbee area and the college instructors established the Sigsbee area stabilization program. Permanent stabilization at any fixed ratio proved impossible because the area was contiguous to the ghetto and hence conveniently located for normal overflow expansion. However, this normal and logical transition was slowed enough to prevent any temporary depression of property values and to forestall any serious racial confrontation. Full credit for this eventuality must be given to the Commission staff and the College instructors rather than to the Human Relations Commission as a whole.²⁰

A third, and similar organization was formed in the Mills Area where many of the older mansion type homes survived of the elegant living of the late nineteenth century when homes served as a major status symbol. The area was richly varied in its religious, racial, and ethnic constituency but all were anxious to prevent deterioration due to overcrowding. The City Inspection Service assisted the Mills Neighborhood Council by restricting the number of families which could be housed in any one residence and

²⁰Sigsbee School Neighborhood Stabilization, Doc. File
No. 50.

the stabilization program proved eminently successful. Again, staff personnel merited full credit for the success of the project.²¹

The Housing Committee had little success in dealing with the Urban Renewal programs. Mr. Keith M. Honey, Director of City Planning, offered the committee two plans for relocation of some 1,400 persons to be evicted in the process of construction of the U.S. 131 through the center of town. The first would force the displaced persons to find new dwellings themselves, most probably by crowding into the poorer housing areas. This would only exacerbate existing problems. The alternate proposal was the construction of public, low-cost housing with private or public funds.²² Nearly 80% of the displaced families were whites whose monthly rental was far too low to permit them to relocate anywhere save in the non-white housing areas.²³ The Commission and Housing Committee debated the plans while the displaced persons found new accommodations on their own. By tedious debate the Commission had escaped any obligation to act.

The second phase of Urban Renewal involved the rehabilitation of the business center of the city and did not directly involve the Commission. But Phase Three was concerned with construction of low-cost housing units in the blighted areas. It presented two major questions--should the program be publicly

²²Grand Rapids City Planning Department, "What Urban Renewal Can Do For Grand Rapids," Nov. 14, 1956, Doc. File No. 37.

²³Rodger Rice and Harold Wiersma, "West Side Story," Jan., 1959, Doc. File No. 37.

or privately financed and should legal measures be taken to insure the concept of desegregation. The City Planning Department designated the Campau School area, a nearly all Black area, for the first unit and submitted plans for approval and funding under the Federal Urban Renewal Work Program.

Because the Planning Commission had not consulted the Human Relations Commission or minority group representatives, as required by law, the Housing Committee, backed by the Commission as a whole, petitioned the Planning Commission to take no formal action until the Federal Requirements were followed.²⁴ Subsequently the Planning Commission appointed some members of the Housing Committee and a few non-white citizens to an Urban Renewal Advisory Committee, which satisfied legal requirements, but nothing more.²⁵ Unsatisfied with this token position, the Housing Committee complained to the City Manager, Mr. Bean, who considered the problem to be minor since the City Commission had not finalized or approved any master plan for urban renewal. He recommended that the committee maintain open lines of communications with the Planning Committee and took no further action.²⁶

A year later, March 19, 1963, a "Twenty Year Master Plan for the City of Grand Rapids" was completed and the City Commission held public hearings on the projection. The HRC Housing Committee

²⁴Mr. Joseph C. Zainea, Letter to Mr. Harry J. Kelly, March 28, 1961, Doc. File No. 62.

²⁵Hous. Com., "Off. Min.," June 21, Oct. 18, 1961; See also: Joseph C. Zainea, Letter to Human Relations Commission, July 26, 1961, Doc. File No. 66.

²⁶Ibid., May 18, 1962.



objected strongly to the plans for low-cost housing within the Campau area which was more suitable for industrial and commercial development than residential. Moreover, the planned location would insure a pattern of segregated housing. The Directors of the Planning Department and the Urban Renewal Program agreed that the area was "a cancerous slum" which had given a negative image to the city. Mrs. Mary Houston, a long-time resident of the area and President of the Campau Park P.T.A., claimed that the average age of homes in the area was over sixty, that the homes generally were in poor condition, and that the residents were unable to afford the cost of major repair. However, most of the residents did not want to move into new neighborhoods because of the expense and because of the excellent schooling their children were receiving. Hence, she supported the proposal for new construction.²⁷

The City Commission approved the Master Plan, as presented, with the clear understanding that there was to be no deviation from the goal of open occupancy and with the understanding that there would be early renewal and development of under-utilized areas in other parts of the city. The HRC never gave unqualified approval to the Campau Housing program since some members felt strongly that the site selection assured an all-Black residential population whereas other members believed that voluntary

²⁷Ibid., Feb. 22 & March 8, 1963; See also: Mrs. Mary Houston: Remarks on Campau Housing, Housing Com., "Off. Min.," April 2, 1963.

segregation was inevitable and not necessarily wrong when it involved good housing units.²⁸

Lack of Federal Funds for housing cooled the ideological conflict for eighteen months but it surged again when the city submitted a second request to the Federal Government for housing renewal money in January, 1965. A detailed survey of the area included inspection of buildings, sidewalks, pavement, sewer, water, street lighting, and family income and appeared to substantiate the claim that it was unfeasable to attempt area-wide rehabilitation. The average family income of the area was about \$4,000 as compared to county-wide income of \$7,000. Forty percent of the residents were classified in the "poverty-stricken" category. No official action was taken on the city's request for two and a half million dollars of federal funds to match \$1,343,000 of city money until after resignation of Mr. Cowles as Executive Director of the Commission.²⁹

At a special meeting of the HRC and the City Commission members, in December, 1965, Mr. Cowles tendered his resignation, effective as of February 1, 1966. He had accepted the position as Executive Director of the Washington State Board Against Discrimination, with headquarters in Seattle. The announcement came as a surprise to most of the Commission members. His

²⁸Ibid., May 17, Nov. 27, 1963.

²⁹Ibid., June 7, 1963, Feb. 11, Oct. 14, 1964; See also: Frances E. Coburn, "Housing of Non-whites in Grand Rapids, Michigan," Grand Rapids Urban League, Committee on Research, May, 1964, Doc. File No. 13.

reputation and excellent record in Grand Rapids had spread through the National Association of Intergroup Relations Officers (NAIRO). Mr. Cowles said that he was reluctant to leave his present position but the position in Washington was too important and too challenging for him to refuse.

At a formal dinner given in his honor a month later, Mr. Cowles offered a series of negative observations. He stated that the inadequate Commission budget prevented the effective operation of the office by providing too few personnel required to complete essential research projects. Too many of the Commission members, new as well as old, did not understand their duties and responsibilities. Extremely critical of the appointment procedure he advised the city fathers to provide for an annual institute to explain the role and function of Commission chairman, committees, and staff in relation to city government. Cowles added that minority housing was the single most pressing problem, having priority over all other intergroup or interracial questions.

Mr. Cowles concluded his remarks by expressing dissatisfaction with the type and amount of cooperation he had received from the minority leaders of the city whom he accused of being ineffective because "they did not want to be in a position of being criticized."³⁰ These remarks drew immediate fire from local minority leaders; Mrs. Hazel Grant, President of the Grand Rapids

³⁰Ibid., Jan 27, 1966; See also: Doc. File No. 77.

NAACP, wrote that his remarks did "not deserve . . . acknowledgment or reply." "Our hope," she added, "is that his departure will improve the cause of civil rights, both here and at his new home."³¹

The Cowles Era in Retrospect

The four and a half years of the Cowles' Directorate witnessed more progress than in any previous period. The adoption of an open housing ordinance and the formal statement of acceptable ethical practices within the Grand Rapids Real Estate Board were giant forward steps. The successful establishment and operations of neighborhood stabilization programs both contiguous and non-contiguous to the "Black Belt" proved what an informed and active Human Relations Commission could accomplish. Obviously most of the actual day-to-day work involved in these projects was performed by the Executive Director and his staff but always with the active support and assistance of Commission members. Nevertheless, the true essence of the minority housing problem had been left untouched. Not only had the general conditions within the ghetto continued to decline rather than improve, but the boundaries of the ghetto had expanded southward and eastward in the city.

Personal relations between the Board of Education and the Commission had improved tremendously. Administrative and teaching

³¹Detroit Free Press, Jan. 27, 1966.

personnel of the schools had been indoctrinated and oriented in the theory of intergroup relations. However, there was little evidence that the theory had been put into practice in the actual classroom situation. De facto school segregation had become far more serious and no effective solution developed. The Commission had adopted a very ambivalent position on district segregation, suggesting no solution other than voluntary bussing to underutilized schools. The "Principals' Report" clearly pointed the way to internal improvements in the schools but implementation of the report had been minor, chiefly because the authorities were afraid to request additional school taxes from the public. Meanwhile, minor racial incidents were increasing in number in schools, playgrounds, and parks.

A few Commission members had become extremely dissatisfied with Mr. Cowles by the end of his directorate. They believed that he was assuming a dictatorial role over the Commission and, at the same time, was falling under the control of the officials of the city government. Certainly they had never established a clear cut line of responsibility of the Director to the Commission and to the City Manager. The enabling ordinance had placed the Executive Director in the middle between two often contending entities. It remained unchanged.

Finally there was developing a definite breakdown of communications between the ghetto residents and the Commission. More and more the minority population lost faith in the Commission

and came to consider it merely as another arm of city government protecting officials from a segment of the people who elected them. New leadership within the ghetto remained unnoticed and unrecognized in the City Hall. The general climate was in transition and new personnel were required to reassess the total situation.

CHAPTER XI

ADVISORY OR INDEPENDENT?

The Human Relations Commission functioned for ten years without seriously attempting to solve two fundamental problems pertaining to its existence and operation. First, was the Commission a body independent of the City Commission and the City Manager, capable of separate action, or was it merely an advisory group, subordinate to the will of the City Commission and City Manager? The second unresolved question concerned the function of the Executive Director as a servant of the Commission, a subordinate of the City Manager, or an independent agent who reported his actions to both the Commission and the City Manager.

The charter enabling act was not clear on either issue. The Commission believed itself independent of city government and resented any attempt to establish a supervisory position. The Commission was divided in its attitude toward the position of the Executive Director; some members believed he should not act without specific direction of the Commission and others believed he could, and should, take directive leadership in intergroup activities and report his actions to the commission for approval and instruction. All members believed he was

independent of the city officials except for salary, staff, budget, office space and supplies.

The city officials thought differently. The Charter gave the Mayor and City Commission the right and responsibility to appoint the Executive Director and his staff and to establish their physical location. The Director and staff were civil service employees and hence subject to the jurisdiction of the City Manager. The municipal authorities believed the role of the Commission was to advise, not direct, the Executive Director.

These were moot questions generally, raised only when some specific conflict arose, such as the Mayor's decision to reduce the number of Commission members. However, a serious conflict developed in the spring and summer of 1965. Mr. Cowles had arranged a meeting of private housing developers from outside the city with representatives of local civil rights groups interested in public and private housing development programs. Some members of the Housing Committee criticized Mr. Cowles severely since the Commission had not approved any single program. They believed his action implied Commission consent. He explained that he had taken no position but had aided in organizing the group as a "catalyst to foster a degree of understanding." He insisted that the autonomy of the Director in action areas was imperative to his position. No further action was taken at the time since the

following month the Mayor's reduction of membership threw the Commission into a temporary state of confusion.¹

A more serious controversy developed over the autonomy of the Director late in the summer of the same year when Mr. Henry Holstege accused Mr. Cowles and Mr. Hillman, Commission Chairman, of having violated established Commission procedures. Mr. Holstege contended that they had, while in Washington, seriously modified the Grand Rapids Community Action Program (CAP) which operated under the authorization of the Federal Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). Mr. Cowles responded that the entire CAP program had been endangered because there were no "poor" representatives on the local committee as required by federal statute and he had added the names of citizens in the area involved so as to insure OEO approval. He admitted he was guilty of procedural error but believed the time element involved had prohibited him from delaying until full discussion could be had with local officials. In the lengthy and heated debate which followed, the majority of the Commission members agreed that the Director had power of initiative, subject to the Commission's later review and recommendation. But a few members believed the Director should act only as specifically directed by the Commission as a whole.²

Following the business of the next regular meeting Mr. Holstege requested that the membership go immediately into

¹"Off. Min.," March 25, 1965; See also: Hous. Com., "Off. Min.," April 14, 1965.

²Ibid., Sept. 28, 1965.

executive session on a private matter. Representatives of the news media and visitors were asked to leave. Mr. Holstege then submitted his written resignation in which he accused Mr. Cowles and Mr. Hillman of deliberately violating Commission procedure; he further indicated his belief that Mr. Cowles was making a power grab for control of the Commission. No solution was forthcoming in the ensuing debate except that Mr. Holstege agreed to withhold his formal resignation for a while. A subsequent meeting produced no reconciliation and Mr. Holstege's second letter of resignation was received and accepted three months later. At this meeting the Commission gave Mr. Cowles a unanimous vote of confidence and the newly appointed City Manager, Mr. Henry B. Nabers, expressed his approval of the actions of Mr. Hillman and Mr. Cowles.³

The position of the Director became the major issue during the interim directorate of Mr. Joseph W. Adler (Feb. 1 to Sept. 1, 1966). The issue was precipitated by a directive sent to Mr. Adler by Mr. Allen S. Olsen, Deputy City Manager, in which he outlined the duties and objectives of the acting director. The directive concluded with the statement: "Yours should be essentially a holding operation with a minimum of public relations content and maximum of staff service."⁴ Obviously the City Managers

³Ibid., Nov. 18, 1965, Feb. 24, 1966.

⁴Allen S. Olsen, G. R. Deputy City Manager, Letter to Mr. Joseph W. Adler, Feb. 2, 1966, Doc. File No. 76.

office was putting the HRC Executive Director under its full control.

The members of the Executive Committee agreed that the communication, as well as subsequent conversations between Mr. Olsen and Mr. Adler, reflected a "misconception by Mr. Olsen of the Human Relations Commission's role in city government. The HRC and not the City Manager sets the HRC policy and directs the action of its staff." The Commission informed Mr. Olsen that it was not a mere advisory body of the city administration.⁵

Mr. Olsen responded that the Director and his staff were Civil Service employees whose salaries and promotions were subject to the authority of the City Manager. He outlined in writing the work assignment for Mr. Adler in which he reiterated the claim of supervision and demanded that he initiate no program without direct approval of the City Manager's office. The directive concluded with the remark that refusal to comply with the order might impair Adler's long-range usefulness to the City or to any organization "in which perceptiveness and balanced initiative are required."⁶

The situation was further complicated when Mayor Sonneveldt indicated to a "blue-ribbon" advisory Committee that in view of the city's severe financial problems it might be necessary to

⁵Executive Com., "Off. Min.," March 10, 1966, Doc. File No. 76; See also: Douglas W. Hillman, Letter to HRC members, March 10, 1966, Doc. File No. 76.

⁶Allen S. Olsen, Letter to Mr. Adler, March 23, 1966, Doc. File No. 83.

abolish the HRC because it was "wasteful," duplicating the work of the Michigan Civil Rights Commission.⁷ Several civic and religious groups expressed their displeasure with the Mayor's remarks.⁸

While the ominous clouds were cast on the authority and responsibility of the Director and on the Commission as a whole, Mr. Adler published a study on the employment practices within city government. The enabling ordinance had obligated the Commission to aid in the development of a Fair Employment Practice policy for the city. Only now did the Adler report suggest strongly that the city itself was guilty of employment discrimination, especially because of Civil Service testing procedures. This report, authorized by the Commission, included a supplemental sheet which compared currently effective salary schedules by race and sex.⁹

The report showed that only one-twentieth of the city's work force was non-white whereas the total city population was one-tenth. Similar disproportionate figures were indicated for Spanish-speaking citizens. In the top one-fifth of all employees by salary there was only one Negro, 320 whites earned more than any Negro employee, a half of the non-whites were employed in

⁷Grand Rapids Press, March 7, 1966; See also: Exec. Com., "Off. Min.," March 17, 1966, Doc. File No. 83.

⁸"Off. Min.," March 24, 1966; See also: Mr. Joseph W. Adler, Letter to Mr. Douglas Hillman, "City Employment Survey," March 30, 1966, Doc. File No. 32.

⁹"A Study of Fair Employment Practices of the City Government," Human Relations Commission, August, 1966, Doc. File No. 32; See also: "Off. Min.," April 23 & June 22, 1966.

janitorial, maintenance, garbage and labor categories and half of all the City Departments employed no black labor whatsoever. Mr. Adler did not attempt to determine if non-white, qualified, personnel interested in city employment were available nor did his report indicate how long present employees had been in their respective positions.

Mr. Adler's summation of the report was made at a regularly scheduled meeting with news media present. Subsequently, various organizations and private citizens added to the confusion with verbal claims and allegations relative to the employment and promotional patterns within City Government, with the Police and Fire Departments singled out for specific indictment. Mr. Hillman appointed a special Ad Hoc Committee to investigate the complaints and to confer with all city officials involved. It interviewed employees, assuring them that there would be no repercussion or reprisals for their expressed opinions. The final report of the Ad Hoc committee did not identify employees by name.

The report found no positive evidence to support the charge of discrimination in the employment practices of the city government but did find evidence of passive discrimination in both employment and promotional procedures. The Committee defined passive discrimination as "the failure to eliminate patterns of hiring and promotion which affected minority groups." The committee recommended the adoption of an "affirmative action employment program" in which a deliberate and conscious effort would be made to employ more non-white citizens. It recommended that all

Committees, Boards, and Commissions of the city include non-white representatives and that a special officer be hired to recruit non-white citizens. The Committee also urged public reaffirmation of the City's policy of non-discrimination by the City Manager and that all advertisements for city employment include an "equal opportunity employer" statement. It was further recommended that an outside agency be hired to study the Civil Service hiring and promotional examinations and that a regular efficiency rating formula be established for evaluating individuals. Finally, the Committee recommended that financial compensation be given to all persons who successfully passed approved courses of study to improve their job performance, perhaps total tuition cost compensation.¹⁰

Mr. Adler announced his resignation on the same day that he gave the "City Employment Practices" report to the City Officials and the news media. Effective September 16, 1966, Mr. Adler assumed the position of Director of the Field Office of the Michigan Civil Rights Commission in Muskegon, Michigan. The City Officials made no statement relative to the report until Mr. Eugene Sparrow had been appointed the new Executive Director.¹¹

In early December City Manager Henry Nabers expressed his pleasure that investigation had found no positive discrimination in the city's procedure but he totally ignored the concept of passive discrimination. He added that salaries for the city's

¹⁰"Study of the Fair Employment Practices of the City Government," Aug. 28, 1966.

¹¹"Off. Min.," Aug. 26, Sept. 22, & Oct. 4, 1966.

uniform personnel, and compensation for improvement courses were not appropriate for unilateral execution by the administration since both were subject to collective bargaining with union representatives under the existing state law. The same held true for appointment of non-whites to the Civil Service Board and for changes in testing methods and efficiency rating procedures. He did agree to place additional emphasis on the hiring of minority people and suggested the Commission might submit names of interested persons when vacancies existed on any of the official boards or commissions. He was "most gratified" with the Commission's "clear refutation" of prejudice in discrimination in the city's employment practices.¹²

The Commission believed that Mr. Nabers had ignored the major portion of the report and asked that he and the Mayor jointly reaffirm in a positive and public declaration the official city position on equal employment opportunity and send a directive to this effect to all department heads. This would not constitute any new city policy but would emphasize the official concept both to department heads and the general public. The Commission further stated that it would watch closely further developments in the implementation of its report.¹³

The report effected little or no change and its impact decreased as time passed. Unfortunately, the damage to the

¹²Henry Nabers, Letter to Douglas Hillman, Dec. 5, 1966, Doc. File No. 32.

¹³"Off. Min.," Dec. 15, 1966.

Commission had already been done. The negative publicity given to the report by the news media prior to the official evaluation by the Ad Hoc Committee, as well as the open conflict between Mr. Adler and Mr. Olsen, had created definite animosity between the Commission and the city officials. The latter regarded the Commission as an actual and potential source of civic disturbance. The Commission regarded the City Manager and the City Commission as antagonists, rather than colleagues, and questioned their sincerity on racial issues. Clearly the effectiveness of the Commission depended chiefly on the ability of the Executive Director to guide the Commission responsibly while at the same time maintaining good relationship with city government.

All the HRC committees suffered from lack of direct supervision of the Executive Director during Mr. Adler's tenure. The personnel Committee, reactivated with the resignation of Mr. Cowles, screened the applicants according to Civil Service procedure. The Education Committee during the Adler period attempted to establish specific guidelines for reporting news items relative to intergroup relations which would be agreeable and reasonable for the news media. The Very Rev. Hugh Michael Beahan, Director of the Aquinas College FM radio station, WXT0, acted as moderator at a luncheon meeting which was poorly attended by news media representatives. The Grand Rapids Press, the only daily newspaper in the city, did not bother to send a representative. The meeting accomplished very little; the individuals present agreed to exercise great care in the identification of individuals

by race, religion, or national origin unless such identification was essential to the story item. The group agreed to give equal coverage to social functions and achievements of minority groups and to avoid spreading of false and dangerous rumors. However, the meeting produced no noticeable change in news reporting or evidence that "guidelines" were ever taken seriously. Moreover, there was no follow-up with the news media on the subject.¹⁴

In February, 1966, the Education Committee held a joint meeting with a selected group of teachers and officers from the core city schools. To encourage participants to express themselves freely, without fear of public castigation, the meeting was not announced to the news media. Mrs. Helen Hutchins, Chairman of the Education Committee, suggested in her opening remarks that the Board of Education hire a Human Relations Specialist. Dr. Jay Pylman, Superintendent of Schools, replied that the Board of Education had authorized tentatively a new position of "Community Relations Director" but he personally believed human relations problems should be handled at each separate school rather than the central office. Hence he expected the new School Community Relations Director to coordinate intergroup activities and to be available to local schools only upon request. Although not in agreement with Dr. Pylman as to the proposed activities of the program, the Education Committee saw it as the first necessary step for improved racial understanding in the schools.

¹⁴Ed. Com., "Off. Min.," Feb. 23 & May 17, 1966.

Many school representatives lauded the Junior Human Relations Clubs and requested the enlargement of the program. The Commission staff was not capable of expanding the scope or numbers of clubs and the school facilities unwilling to assume this responsibility. Rather, the already existing clubs began to decline greatly in size and activities in subsequent months. This was still another example of a potential asset being lost because of lack of staff personnel and inability of commission members to participate personally in positive programs.

Several participants requested that the Human Relations Staff be included in the regular teacher inservice training program but since no actual mechanics for this participation were established the concept died at the meeting. Several teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the teacher-training programs of universities and colleges within the state except for a few of the small, private institutions. They felt the programs did not prepare future teachers for the problems which they would face daily in the inner-city schools. Mr. Romani, Principal of Central High School, observed that over 70% of all newly assigned teachers in the inner city schools were either inadequate to the task or requested a transfer to other schools after one year of teaching. This rapid turnover of teachers resulted in staff instability which seriously weakened the school's effectiveness. The educators asked Commission members to contact the State Board of Education and the Education Department Chairman of all the universities and colleges in the state to urge that new

emphasis be placed on the proper techniques of teaching in the inner city. This was done later by the Commission staff but no change was effected prior to 1968. The assembled group felt that regular meetings for the exchange of ideas and problems should be held. However, there were no other such meetings and the Commission again neglected to use a golden opportunity.

A humorous footnote to the meeting was the communication from Mr. Olsen, Deputy City Manager, present at the meeting, who reported to the City Manager that the session was totally unproductive and insulting to the representatives of the schools. One of the participants later observed that such a report from a city representative who had slept for most of the meeting was completely representative of the attitude of Mr. Olsen for the Commission.¹⁵

The Housing Committee during the Adler interim directorate continued to battle with the Urban Renewal Committee of the city. This group favored construction of town-house cooperative apartments based on a forty-year mortgage concept. Although generally popular nationally, area residents believed the program served chiefly the middle-income family brackets rather than the lower family income groups.¹⁶

The Housing Committee invited Mr. Rice of the Calvin College Sociology department to up-date the 1959 survey of Negro

¹⁵Ibid., April 20, & May 17, 1966.

¹⁶Hous. Com., "Off. Min.," Jan. 20, 1966.

residential housing patterns. The new survey included additional information concerning educational level, family income, length of residence, migration patterns, and the attitudes of the residents. The only change noted after seven years was the continued migration of non-whites into the contiguous ghetto area in the east and south.¹⁷

The low-cost Campau housing project on South Division had been suspended when federal funds were lacking. With money again available, the conflict over location in an all Negro area reopened. Station WOOD-TV entered into the controversy with a formal editorial opposing any rehabilitation program until a "combination of public housing and private development" study committee be appointed by the City Commission to study the entire housing problem of the city. The editorial expressed particular concern for the development of low rental accommodations for large families with minimal family incomes.¹⁸ The Housing Committee arranged an open meeting for people in and out of the Campau area to express their opinions and questions. The Mayor, a few City Commissioners, representatives of GRREB, and approximately a hundred citizens attended. Many individuals expressed considerable dissatisfaction because of the lack of information available to the general public and the inadequate, negative, and defensive responses given to questions by the City Officials.

¹⁷Rodger Rice, "Housing Patterns of Negroes in Grand Rapids," Hous. Com., "Off. Min.," April 4, 1966.

¹⁸WOOD-TV "Editorial," Feb. 9, 1966.

The only valid purpose served by this confrontation was that the city officials became more aware of the dissatisfaction evidenced by the people of the area.¹⁹

While large scale housing redevelopment remained at a standstill, a NAACP survey indicated that between 1940 and 1960 some ten thousand new homes had been built in the city, forty-four of which were occupied by Blacks. The population density within the ghetto was nineteen persons per acre as compared to five persons per acre in the rest of the city. Housing prices in the ghetto had risen greatly because of supply and demand. The NAACP suggested that the Community Action Program (CAP) develop and operate a "Home Buyers" clinic to replace earlier, abortive, attempts of the HRC staff to operate a similar program. This recommendation became a reality shortly afterwards.²⁰

Neighborhood stabilization programs continued to prosper under the Adler administration. When panic selling again threatened the Huff area, the residents obtained from Mr. John M. Perschbacher, Executive Vice President of the GRREB, an agreement to a temporary moratorium on home sales in the area for ninety days to stabilize property values. In fact, the moratorium on

¹⁹Hous. Com., "Off. Min.," May 5, 1966; See also: "Off. Min.," Jan. 23, 1966.

²⁰Robert D. Windver, "Home Buyers Clinic Handbook," NAACP-Aquinas College (Summer), 1966, Doc. File No. 26.

sale of land was extended an additional ninety days and it did achieve the desired objective.²¹

Finally, the Commission attempted to achieve greater rapport with residents of the inner city by opening an office within the CAP Sheldon Complex. Although the results were satisfactory enough to warrant a permanent office being established in the Complex, Mr. Adler's resignation left no staff member available to meet with the people. Because the project was never attempted again, the experiment increased the negative attitude toward the Commission of the very people it was established to serve.²²

The eight months of the Adler Directorate (Jan. 1-Sept. 1, 1966) continued the improvement of communications between the Commission and the Board of Education. Also, the neighborhood stabilization programs appeared to point a way toward peaceful, bi-racial, housing patterns.

On the negative side, staff relations with the city government deteriorated greatly. The Adler-Olsen controversy concerning lines of authority and direction were never solved. The special report on the hiring and promotional practices of the city made the officials definitely suspicious of the Commission, if not absolutely antagonistic. As of September, 1966,

²¹John M. Perschbacher, Letter: All Members of GRREB, April 19, 1966, HRC, "Off. Files," "Huff Organization;" See also: "Off. Files": "Neighborhood Stabilization--East Fuller Area."

²²"Off. Min.," Feb. 24, April 28, & May 9, 1966.

an armed truce existed while awaiting the arrival of the Executive Director, Mr. Eugene Sparrow.

The failure of the Commission to achieve any positive action in public or private housing redevelopment had damaged the general image of the Commission in the minds of inner city residents even though other city agencies, such as the Urban Renewal Board and the Planning Commission were more directly responsible. The citizens blamed the Commission for the failure and believed it was becoming a mere tool or adjunct to the official family of City Hall.

Obvious discord existed on the Commission itself and some members were raising the question as to its ability to operate successfully in the future. Some members believed the Commission had served its purpose and was no longer needed. Certainly, Mr. Sparrow began his term as Executive Director under the most unfavorable conditions possible.

CHAPTER XII

THE MUSTACHE INCIDENT

The sit-in of four college students at a Woolworth lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina on February 1, 1960, introduced the nonviolent, direct action tactics of the Civil Rights movement, a radical departure from the legalistic technique utilized for five decades by the NAACP. Employed successfully by Dr. Martin Luther King and others, the nonviolent, direct action program constituted a major influence on the passing of the Federal Civil Rights Law of 1964 although it did not achieve voting rights for Blacks.

Nor did the Civil Rights Act put an end to the vicious circle which had entrapped the average Negro. Unable to obtain a good salaried position without adequate education, he attended the inferior, de facto segregated schools in his neighborhood which he necessarily went to because he was unable to escape to new sections of town because of his low annual income. Disillusionment followed and the nonviolent, peaceful resistance gave way to violence, riots and burning.

The Harlem riots in New York in 1964 found the Negro leaders unable to control the anger and anarchy of the unorganized, excited youth who had little or no respect whatsoever even for his

own life or property. The following summer Negroes in the Watts ghetto section of Los Angeles entered into an orgy of burning and looting, with snipers from roof tops preventing white firemen from putting out the fires. Thirty-three Negroes died in this senseless sequence which took place in their neighborhood rather than areas of white middle class Americans. The riot syndrome spread to other cities which had a sizeable number of ghettoized Negroes.

The concept of Black Power was enunciated by Stokely Carmichael in the summer of 1966 and spread fear and terror throughout white America. The term Black Power had various meanings; to Carmichael it meant the end of nonviolent resistance while to Dr. King and Mr. Whitney Young it meant development by Blacks of pride of origin, race and color. But to white America, Black Power meant violence, burning, looting and killing. The riots in Chicago, Detroit, Newark, Philadelphia and elsewhere, even though all took place in the Negro section of the city, threatened the white middle class preoccupation with property value and white supremacy. It was under these national conditions that Mr. Eugene Sparrow began his work as Executive Director on September 1, 1966. He had been previously the Director of the Cincinnati Human Relations Commission, and prior to that Director of Field Services for the Unitarian-Universalist Church and Acting Executive Director of the Springfield (Mass.) Urban League. A graduate of Harvard Divinity School, Mr. Sparrow had taught at

both the elementary and college levels.¹ The informal reception for Mr. and Mrs. Sparrow at the Franklin School did not compensate for his lack of an office staff or for the vacancies existing on the Commission. The City Commission again turned down the request for a new Assistant Executive on grounds of insufficient funds. The Human Relations Commission suspected that it was being used by the City Commission as a means of influencing the voters to approve a one percent city income tax. The City Commission authorized the appointment of Mr. David Boguki to the vacant position immediately following the income tax approval, thereby indicating that there was more than a simple suspicion of truth to the original suspicion. Mr. Boguki of Yakima, Washington, had graduated from Washington State University with a political science major, and had subsequently worked in VISTA in the central office of NAIRO. He began work in Grand Rapids on March 2, 1967.²

Mayor Sonneveldt and City Manager Nabers approved the appointments of the Commission's recommendations for filling the two existing vacancies on the Commission. The Mayor's office notified Sr. Mary James Rau, O.P., Chairman of the Sociology Department, Aquinas College, and Mr. Chester Bulthuis, a Bell Telephone Company Executive, of their appointments but later had to inform them that the City Commission had refused to confirm the recommendations. The City Commission took this action because both individuals had originally been recommended by

¹"Off. Min.," Feb. 24, April 28, & June 9, 1966.

²Ibid., Feb. 24, 1966; See also: Grand Rapids Civil Service Commission, Personnel Records: "David Boguki."

the Human Relations Commission which seemed to indicate that it was attempting to become a self-perpetuating agency outside of control of city government.³

The Commission took direct affront to this action of the City Commission and directed Mr. Sparrow to study procedures previously followed in filling vacancies. This survey indicated that in the past the Commission had recommended regularly individuals knowledgeable in the field of intergroup relations and willing to devote their time to the work. Moreover, the survey further revealed that members whose appointments originated in the City Commission generally did not possess the necessary qualifications or who, because of press of private business, were not available for meeting. However, the real, unanswered question was obvious: did the City Fathers want a Commission as an active agency, initiating programs, or merely a passive, buffer group standing between the civic officials and the citizens.⁴

Two City Commissioners requested information of Mr. Sparrow as to his proper chain of command thereby indicating that the members of the City Commission itself did not understand completely his dual line of responsibility. Mr. Sparrow, therefore, scheduled a joint meeting of the two commissioners in order to clarify the issue for everyone.⁵ Mayor Sonneveldt ignored the

³Executive Com., "Off. Min.," Oct. 6, 1966, Jan. 17, 1967.

⁴Ibid., Jan. 17, 1967.

⁵Ibid., Jan. 24, 1967; See also: "Off. Min.," Oct. 25, 1966.

primary purpose of the joint session when he opened the meeting with an accusation that the Commission was misdirecting its activities by attacking the propaganda of the local John Birch Society instead of preparing for the potentially more dangerous threat to the city's tranquility, the scheduled visit of Mr. Stokely Carmichael.

The John Birch Society had been very active in Grand Rapids which was known nationwide for its conservatism and right wing Republican politics. The society had opened two reading rooms in the city, distributed free a considerable amount of printed materials, and frequently supplied speakers to service organizations and to Church and P.T.A. groups. The organization and its speakers condemned the Civil Rights program as part of the Communist plot to overthrow the American Government and, at least by implication, stigmatized all civil rights proponents, national or local, as being suspect as fellow travellers. The HRC members were at first confused with this unexpected attack but then a few members pointed out that the city ordinance required the Commission to combat extremism of all types. They argued that agitators of the extreme political right were as potentially dangerous to the city's tranquility as was the scheduled visit of Mr. Carmichael. Whereas adequate police protection was assured for the Carmichael speech, there were no plans existing to protect the people from the radical extremism of the violent political right.

In spite of this poor beginning, the meeting proved profitable since it opened avenues of communication which had been lacking previously. Both Commissions agreed to hold similar meetings in the future at regular intervals. City Manager Nabers ended the meeting with specific approval of Mr. Sparrow's work. Although there was a noticeable decline in tension and friction between the two commissions in the months which followed, the proposed, regular joint commission meetings were never held. Nor is there any record that either group subsequently requested another joint session.⁶

In an attempt to learn the reaction of the inner city residents to urban renewal, the Commissioners discovered that the burning issue involved facial hair. In a sense the Commission had asked for it. Believing that minorities would speak more freely in neighborhood meetings than at City Hall, the Commission held an open session, August 25, 1966, at the Campau School where urban renewal was creating tension.⁷ Commission members were startled by the questions, most of which related to the expulsion from South High School of an eighteen year old Black who refused to shave his mustache. Mr. Charles Davidson, Principal of South High School, had published a series of regulations governing pupil conduct and appearance which included the statement: "Mustaches, goatees, and hair on the face will not be permitted."⁸ Mr. Davidson

⁶Ibid., May 5, 1967.

⁷Ibid., Aug. 25, 1966, Oct. 27, 1966.

⁸HRC, "Off. Files": "Mustache Incident," Letter to Parents, South High School, Sept. 16, 1966.

expelled Mr. Cleo Cross, an 18 year old Negro student who refused to shave his mustache. Mrs. Lettie Ann Cross, the boy's mother, appealed to Mr. Ray Tardy, Director of the Sheldon Complex Community Action Program, for assistance. Many Negro community leaders, ministers, and South High School students supported Mr. Cross. Dr. Pylman, Superintendent of Schools, announced his intention to support Mr. Davidson's policy at a special meeting of the Board of Education to which officials of the CAP program, ministers, and parents of South High School students were invited. Mr. Tardy stated at this meeting that mustaches played an important role in Negro culture and that the students were emulating the successful national Negro leaders, nearly all of whom wore mustaches. He concluded his report with the statement: "We do not feel that this is an insignificant issue."⁹

The news media took up the sensational character of the issue. The Detroit Free Press contacted Mr. Romulus Romani of Central High School who said that in his school "total grooming" was demanded but he had no opposition to mustaches. Mr. R. Carlson, Asst. Principal of Ottawa High School, agreed with Mr. Romani. The Grand Rapids Press carried a feature story on the history of beards and mustaches throughout American History, with pictures of Grand Rapids and Michigan notables of past eras who wore them.¹⁰ Mr. Sparrow claimed the problem was "essentially one of

⁹Grand Rapids Press, Oct. 26, 1966.

¹⁰Detroit Free Press and Grand Rapids Press, Oct. 28, 1966.

personalities rather than issues" and that many whites were ignorant of the more intimate and unspoken symbols of the minority groups.¹¹

The issue generated great tension with deep racial significance. Mr. Davidson, supported by Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Pylman, refused to respond to pressure tactics on what he considered his total disciplinary routine. Mrs. Cross refused to accept any compromise and instituted legal suit against the Board of Education. An anonymous telephone call alerted the HRC staff to a potential riot in the halls of South High School and a request from Mr. Sparrow to the Chief of Police resulted in immediate police protection in the school. A special meeting called by the Mayor of all interested parties found no solution. The Chicago regional office of OEO, after formal investigation reported that the local Community Action Program personnel had every right to enter into the fray. The local Negro weekly, The Grand Rapids Times, stated that the real issue was that the white majority, and many self-styled Negro leaders "simply have not been in contact with the mass of the people in the Ghetto area," whereas the CAP officials did understand the importance of the incident.¹²

Some three hundred citizens, including many ministers and community leaders, held a mass meeting at the New Hope Baptist

¹¹Eugene Sparrow, Letter to Douglas Hilman, Nov. 2, 1966, Contained in HRC, "Off. Files": "Mustache Incident."

¹²Executive Com., "Off. Min.," Nov. 7, 1966; See also: Grand Rapids Press, Nov. 11, Nov. 12, 1966.

Church on Nov. 8, 1966 and attacked the mustache regulation as a violation of constitutional rights. A few days later some 250 Negro students walked out of South High School, taking the school officials by surprise although rumors of the intended walkout had been circulating for almost two weeks. Mr. Davidson reported to the Board of Education at an "emergency meeting" that the students' attitude had deteriorated from one of respect for authority to a "go-to-hell" attitude which had set the total school program back at least half a year. That same night demonstrators picketed a Parent-Teacher Association meeting held at the school.¹³

WOOD-TV supported Mr. Davidson's ruling in an editorial read several times over the air and later printed for general circulation. The editorial claimed the issue was one of student defiance rather than a racial problem. Two days later a second WOOD-TV editorial requested all the students involved in the protests be expelled as the first step to stop "this drift of anarchy."¹⁴

Mr. Tardy, CAP Director, added fuel to the controversy when he stated publicly that Mr. Davidson was the type of a man "who'd make a rule and be too small to change it even if he knew he was wrong."¹⁵ This comment resulted in a third WOOD-TV

¹³Grand Rapids Press, Nov. 15, 1966.

¹⁴"Editorial," WOOD-TV, Nov. 16, 1966; See also: HRC, "Off. Files": Mustache.

¹⁵Raymond Tardy, Quoted in the Grand Rapids Press, Nov. 16, 1966.

editorial supporting Mr. Davidson's "tough rules" for the minority students who "go to the toilet on floors, attack girls, assault teachers, and otherwise act like animals." This editorial called Negro protesters "animals" several times.¹⁶

Mrs. Dorothy Hoogterp, South High School nurse, informed the Commission that Dr. E. B. Prothro, Public Health Director, had transferred her from South High School because she had supported Mr. Cross in a poem printed in the Negro Weekly. Moreover, he had curtailed her activities at the Sheldon (CAP) Complex.¹⁷

Public opinion on the issue was clearly divided as evidenced from the numerous letters appearing in the Public Pulse of the local paper. Noel P. Fox, Federal District Judge, attempted to avoid an open court battle and met in closed session with Mr. Cross, his mother, and his attorney, John B. Martin, and the legal representatives of the Board of Education. No positive settlement was reached.¹⁸ The Inter-Denominational Ministerial Alliance offered its services to find an "amicable resolution" to the dilemma without success.¹⁹

The attorney for the Cross family agreed to postpone further legal action until the special, fifteen member committee appointed by the Board of Education to review the school's rules

¹⁶ WOOD-TV, Nov. 23, 1966, HRC, "Off. Files": Mustache.

¹⁷ Executive Com., "Off. Min.," Nov. 29, 1966.

¹⁸ Grand Rapids Press, Nov. 28, 1966.

¹⁹ Detroit Free Press, Dec. 2, 1966.

of grooming made its final report. This "Citizens" committee, composed of teachers, students, parents, and ministers, recommended (12-1 vote) the Board rescind the mustache prohibition and permit students to wear "neatly trimmed, non-conspicuous" mustaches. The Board followed the recommendation, readmitted Mr. Cross (with mustache), provided him with special tutoring for school time lost during his suspension, and, in turn, the legal suit was dropped. Mrs. Hoogterp was permitted to continue her work with South High School students in the evenings, an arrangement satisfactory to her since she wanted to continue the programs she had started but did not wish to work directly under Mr. Davidson.²⁰

While the "mustache" incident had many humorous aspects, it represented serious dissatisfaction existing within the inner city and a near total lack of communications among the younger, minority element of the Negro population. It indicated further serious dissatisfaction of the non-white population with the entire school situation and the general racial imbalance within the schools.

The role of the HRC throughout this entire sequence was generally negative. Mr. Sparrow and a few members of the Commission became actively and personally involved in most aspects from start to finish. In general these individuals were not in

²⁰"Citizens Report," Jan. 4, 1967, "Off. Files": Mustache Incident;" See also: Grand Rapids Press, Dec. 5, 1966, Jan. 9, 1967, Executive Com., "Off. Min.," Dec. 15, 1966, Feb. 2, 1967.

agreement with Mr. Davidson or with the actions of the school officials. However, most Commission members believed maintenance of discipline was the major issue and could not accept the reality of facial hair as a part of personal rights. Also, some of the commissioners identified all long haired youths as "hippies" or rebels against the established culture code of American society. The majority of the Commission, therefore, were not, nor did they want to be, involved in what they considered merely a school disciplinary issue. They did not condemn or object to the participation of staff or other members as long as they acted as individuals and not official representatives of the Commission.

The Board of Education had appointed in November, 1965, a fifty-two man committee, chaired by Mr. Chester Hall, Executive Secretary of the YMCA, to work with professional consultants on this question of racial imbalance within the schools. Dr. James Hoffman, Associate Professor and Coordinator of Student Teaching and Internship, Michigan State University, edited the final "Hall Report." This document stated clearly that racial imbalance existed in the Grand Rapids Public Schools and had been increasing significantly since 1950. The report enthusiastically endorsed desegregation of schools and a compensatory program of education in the inner city schools. Among the thirty-two specific recommendations, the Hall Report charged the Board of Education with the task of promoting open housing as a means of curbing de facto segregation. It also recommended that new teaching techniques be developed, a more meaningful curriculum including vocational

training, and a lower student-teacher ratio in the core area schools.²¹ The Board of Education had taken no action on this report prior to the "Mustache Incident," further indicating lack of communication between the Board and the residents of the ghetto.

Mr. Sparrow, Mr. Tardy, and others who had been involved in the "Mustache Incident" organized an intergroup, interagency, "Pipeline Committee" for quick action whenever rumors, however ill-founded, indicated even a possibility of developing tension areas. The committee, composed of staff officials of several intergroup agencies, met monthly for a year, after the racial disturbances in the summer of 1967. It achieved nothing except to prove that there existed no unanimity of ideas as to what should be done, or what action taken, if or when problems were identified. The membership of all agencies represented were informed regularly but no agency felt the need for further action.²²

The Commission held its second, regional, open meeting at the Madison Park School within the inner city. Many Commission members appeared dissatisfied with the work of Mr. Sparrow since committee activities were generally non-existent and attendance at monthly Commission meetings poor. Mr. Sparrow took this opportunity to express his dissatisfaction with the entire structure and operation of the Human Relations Commission. Reminding the group of the unsolved problem of the Executive Director's dual

²¹ Chester Hall, "Hall Report," Nov. 3, 1965, Doc. File No. 1.

²² HRC, "Off. Files": Intergroup-Interagency Pipeline Committee.

responsibility to the Commission and to the City Manager and the ever existing problem of vacancies in the Commission, he seriously questioned the validity of committees which were unable to perform independently of the director. He recommended that the Commission hire a special consultant to study the total Commission, its ordinance, operation, relationship to the City Government and its responsibility to the community. The Executive Committee agreed to study the request.²³

Citizens present at the meeting were also extremely vocal in their criticism of the Commission for its inactivity and lack of clarity as to its role and responsibility. Mr. Hillman pointed out that the failure of the City Commission to fill the five existing vacancies had seriously hampered the work of the Commission. Five days later the City Commission did appoint members to the vacancies, four of whom were old members reappointed and one new appointment. Mr. Lorree Glover, Political Activities Chairman of the NAACP Trade Union Leadership Committee was not reappointed and many citizens felt that his non-reappointment was due to his opposition to the city's housing proposals.²⁴

At the next meeting of the Commission, held at the Church of the Redeemer in the inner city, all fifteen Commission members were present. At this meeting the citizens present severely criticized the Commission for its failure to take any positive

²³"Off. Min.," May 25, 1967.

²⁴Boyd Conrad, News Editor, Radio Station WMAX, "Editorial," May 31, 1967.

action against the teen-age prostitution flourishing on South Division Avenue. Several mothers stated that not only were thirteen and fourteen year old girls soliciting openly but that they were enticing other girls their ages into this very lucrative profession. One Commission member denied the seriousness of the allegations and was invited to tour the street immediately and report back that same night. He accepted the challenge, drove his car slowly up and back a half mile of South Division Avenue, during which time he was propositioned by voice or gestures five separate times. In each case the offer was made by two or three girls, all of whom appeared to be under sixteen. This Commission member commented that the trade appeared to be truly integrated since both white and black races seemed to team up. The Executive Committee was directed to work out a solution with the Police Department.²⁵ The following day four members of the Commission met with Police Chief William Johnson. He agreed to have police officers walk the beat along South Division; the results were immediate; open prostitution on the Avenue disappeared. The Commission's satisfaction was only mildly dissipated when Chief Johnson informed the Commission that shortage of officers made the procedure a temporary one and that the prostitutes had taken up business along other streets or had become members of a pimp's stable in which the girls' operations became more regularized, even if less profitable.²⁶

²⁵"Off. Min.," May 25, 1967.

²⁶Ibid., June 29, 1967, Executive Com., "Off. Min.," July 17, 1967.

The end to open prostitution on South Division was another example of the Commission's inability to "see the forest because of the trees." The "Adler Report" had indicated a very low ratio of non-white policemen, the negative effects which Civil Service requirements had on police recruitment of Negroes, and the attitudes of the younger non-white males who considered the police their natural enemies. As in other cities, potential candidates for police work were frequently considered to be traitors to the Negro cause. Alleged incidents of police brutality, as well as promotional discrimination of Negro officers within the department, were part of the same rationale.

Rev. Mr. Duncan Littlefair, pastor of the Fountain Street Church, suggested that the Commission initiate a long range, police-community relations program. The Executive Director contacted the Scientific Resources, Inc., Union City, N.J., which had developed such a program and the Grand Rapids Foundation agreed to fund the experiment. In the first phase five policemen and five residents met in an indoctrination session to establish guidelines of operation and objectives. Seven future sessions were projected, each phase lasting from three to ten days, ultimately including twenty police and twenty civilians. These forty people, when trained, would conduct similar programs involving potentially an unlimited number of participants. The essential technique utilized was that of "group therapy" on a marathon basis, with "eye-ball to eye-ball" confrontation and "no holds barred." The program was intended to produce deeper understanding on the part

of all involved of the mutual problems, linguistic differences, images and norms which could be used for self correction and personal evaluation. All sessions were conducted and supervised by SRI specialists.

Intense personal involvement took place in all the sessions in which the members spoke out freely, without fear of reprisals. Dr. Louis Radelet, Director of the National Police Community Relations Institute of Michigan State University and Mr. Louis Rome, Executive Secretary of the Michigan Crime Commission attended the sessions as observers. Both were tremendously impressed, as was the Police Chief Johnson, whose only negative comment was that other metropolitan area police had not been involved.²⁷ Many of the participants were able to put their Training Institute lessons into usage during the disturbances of July, 1967. They were very helpful in bringing the riot to a quick conclusion before extreme damage had been done to property or temper of the general public.²⁸

During the first year of Mr. Sparrow's directorate only two of the standing committees were active. The Education Committee again attempted to establish a Speakers' Bureau, which the Commission endorsed enthusiastically as usual. The Bureau

²⁷Scientific Resources, Inc., "Grand Rapids Police-Community Program," Doc. File No. 16. This file also includes letters from Dr. Louis Radelet and Louis Rome to Police Superintendent William A. Johnson (Feb. 11 & Feb. 16, 1967), and from Chief Johnson to the Grand Rapids Foundation (Feb. 20, 1967) evaluating the total program.

²⁸Grand Rapids Press, April 11-14, 1967, Doc. File No. 16.

never materialized in fact and another potentially valuable facet of community education in intergroup relations died at birth.²⁹

The Education Committee attempted to develop an "inservice" training program for the Commissioners, department heads, and others. Dr. Albert Levak, Michigan State University, assisted in the preparing of operational programs which, unfortunately, never progressed beyond the theoretical state. This failure was but another conspicuous example of the inability of the Commission to transform plans into action.³⁰

The Education Committee recommended that a course be taught in the evening at one of the city agencies on the "History of the Negro in America." Mr. Jacob Robinson, a Negro teacher at Catholic Central High School, with the assistance of one of the Commission members, conducted an eight week lecture-discussion course in the fall of 1967. Less than twenty-five people attended these lectures regularly, all but five of whom were whites. For reasons never determined, both the Commission staff and the Sheldon (CAP) Complex failed to give adequate publicity to the lectures.³¹

The activities of the Housing Committee were even less productive during the same period. Mr. Donald O'Keefe, Director

²⁹Ed. Com., "Off. Min.," Dec. 6, 1966.

³⁰Dr. Albert Levak, Director of Office of Human Relations, Michigan State University, Letter to Mr. Eugene Sparrow, "Off. Files": Inservice Training Program," July 21, 1967.

³¹Ed. Com., "Off. Min.," June 6, 1967, Feb. 29, 1968.

of the Grand Rapids Housing Authority, informed the committee that four hundred housing units in the inner city were projected, one hundred and fifty units being reserved for the aged. Response to the formal application for a financial grant submitted to the Federal Housing Authority was expected within nine months. One member of the Commission recommended that at least a hundred of these proposed units be constructed in the Campau Area as a means of stabilizing the area and in order to encourage property owners to improve the conditions of their homes. The Commission as a whole disagreed since they felt the dangers of segregation greatly outweighed the potential advantages. At a subsequent public meeting it was obvious that some residents of the area wanted "improvement now" whereas others opposed any project which would tend to stabilize a totally segregated neighborhood.³²

The Human Relations Commission was forced to face the issue when Mr. Lorree Glover introduced a formal resolution in opposition to residential segregation. The resolution, if adopted, would have limited federal housing units in the Campau area to "no more than one-fourth of the total" public housing units erected and that one-half of all such units be constructed in non-ghetto areas with open occupancy.³³ The Commission, after considerable discussion, adopted the resolution and forwarded

³²Hous. Com., "Off. Min.," Sept. 8, 1966; See also: Grand Rapids Press, Oct. 3, 1966.

³³Lorree Glover, "Housing Resolution," Contained in full in "Off. Min.," Oct. 27, 1966.

it to the City Commission which took no action save to refer it to the committee for study and comment.

A similar, detailed study by the Grand Rapids Real Estate Board (GRREB) on the changing population distribution in the city concluded that any over-all urban renewal program must, of necessity, be coupled with neighborhood stabilization and rehabilitation plans of deteriorated, but basically sound, areas. The report further demanded more rigid enforcement of the existing housing code by the Health Department.³⁴

Public Health Engineer, Mr. Ettesvold, informed the Commission that he and his five inspectors had visited over two thousand dwelling units in the first eleven months of 1966, as a result of which home owners had already spent \$110,000 to correct code violations. This estimate was low since much of the repair had been done by the owners themselves. His department had condemned an additional 128 homes as unfit for human habitation. At the same time, Mr. Ettesvold admitted that his staff was unable to keep up with the expanding demands on their time.³⁵

Inspection authorities were reluctant to condemn homes, especially of non-whites, because of the extreme difficulty in locating living quarters at a comparable rental. A sociology student of Grand Rapids Junior College provided an interesting

³⁴"Solid Values in a Changing Grand Rapids," GRREB, 1964, Doc. File No. 22.

³⁵"Off. Min.," Sept. 16, Dec. 6, 1967, Housing Com., "Off. Min.," Dec. 6, 1967.

paper on this specific problem. He inquired by phone as to availability of homes and apartments listed in the Grand Rapids Press, April 11 and 16, 1967. When the student identified himself as Negro, only 30% of the owners agreed to show him the listed unit, most of which were located within the ghetto area. A few of the units listed were not available for white occupancy.³⁶

It was obvious that non-whites had difficulty in finding dwelling units outside the ghetto but equally obvious that the ghetto itself was gradually extending into the contiguous areas to the south and east. Stabilization programs were successful in slowing down the movement of non-whites into the contiguous area but not stopping it. More important the programs did slow down the departure of whites from the area which was really the prime objectives of such programs. Sales moratoriums of the GGREB slowed white home owners departure but could not attract new white property buyers.³⁷ The Housing Committee developed no simple formula to provide the required, decent, low-cost housing so urgently needed.

³⁶"Occupancy Survey," May 3, 1967, Doc. File No. 11; See also: Grand Rapids Press, Nov. 26, 1966.

³⁷"Mills Neighborhood Stabilization Council," March 22, 1967, Doc. File No. 21.

CHAPTER XIII

THE "LONG, HOT, SUMMER"

Mr. Sparrow effected no dramatic change or accomplishment during his first ten months as executive director. He did become aware of the mounting tensions within minority groups and became increasingly fearful of the possibility of civil disturbances whereas almost all other city officials were very complacent and unworried. Five years previously Mr. Alfred Cowles had told the Police Department that there was no concern for mass disturbance in the city but, in the same lecture, recognized the possibility of trouble in the near future.¹ Mr. Cowles, former Executive Director, had informed the members of the City Commission that "the climate in the city is at a high level."² Msgr. Popell, Pastor of the Catholic Cathedral Parish, affirmed that the city had no serious racial problem since peaceful, non-violent solutions were being pursued by both public and church groups.³ Mr. Cowles told the members of the Chamber of Commerce that the local minority situation in housing, employment, and public accommodations was

¹Alfred Cowles, Police Inservice Training Program, March 20-22, 1962, Doc. File No. 20, "Riot."

²"Off. Min.," June 28, 1962.

³Ibid., June 27, 1963.

generally good but some problems still existed in the field of education.⁴

The local "Black Muslim" group caused only a small ripple of concern. Unofficially, its membership was estimated to be under 20 persons in 1963 and possibly as high as 50 a year later. A house-to-house membership drive late in the summer raised the membership to about 200. Mr. Cowles referred to the Black Muslims as "the most dangerous group in the city" and compared it to the Ku Klux Klan or the Southern White Citizens' Council. He observed, however, that while 200 active members represented less than one percent of the city's Negro population, it was a force large enough to cause trouble. The Commission did not consider the group important enough to warrant taking any action.⁵

The race riots in Los Angeles in the summer of 1965 triggered concern in most American cities. Mr. Cowles informed the City Manager that the local climate was healthy and the existing tensions were not the type which produced race riots. Mr. Alex Barton, WOOD-TV, produced an hour long documentary on the local minority opinions concerning the conditions within the city. The tape-recorded interviews revealed that local Negro citizens believed that conditions similar to those existing in Los Angeles

⁴Alfred Cowles, "Situation Evaluation," Speech given to Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce, Aug. 7, 1963, Doc. File No. 73.

⁵Alfred Cowles, Speech on WOOD-TV, Dec. 13, 1964, Doc. File No. 72.

did exist in Grand Rapids but that the white population was not aware that these conditions were present. The Negroes interviewed expressed complaints against housing, employment, education, inadequate recreational facilities and police brutality. They also observed that there was lack of proper communication with the white population and the lack of responsible Negro leadership within the community.⁶

Commenting on the documentary program, Mr. Cowles admitted the existence of widespread unemployment among the non-white but blamed this condition on the recent migration of unskilled and untrained persons from the deep South. He claimed that unfair employment practices in the local labor market was negligible and denied that the alleged police brutality could be substantiated in a thorough and impartial investigation. He admitted the existence of a definite housing problem and surmised it would continue for the foreseeable future. He believed the documentary served a good purpose since it might alert uninformed elements of the community to the crucial and sensitive nature of race relations but denied the possibility of a local race riot if all citizens renewed their dedication to the cause of human rights and the solutions to the complex problems.⁷

⁶"The Aftermath--Comments by Grand Rapids' Negro Community on the Los Angeles Riots," Sept. 1965, Complete text of program contained in Doc. File No. 92.

⁷Alfred Cowles, "Comments on WOOD-TV Documentary," Sept. 20, 1965, Doc. File No. 74.

The increase of racial tensions became obvious with the approach of the summer of 1967. The "Mustache Incident" had produced other incidents, such as Mr. Davidson's request for school guards because of increased vandalism of teachers' cars and school property.⁸ Mr. Sparrow observed that a riot syndrome was developing within the younger element of the Negro population. He recommended a more aggressive "push for equality on every front, irrespective of what interests are hurt" and expressed fear that without this increased aggressiveness the work of the Human Relations Commission would "be rendered completely ineffective."⁹ Other commission members made similar observations and one member was "shocked by the obvious tense hostility" she experienced when addressing a group of young Negroes.¹⁰

Mr. Paul Phillips, Executive Director of the Urban League, met on July 12, 1967, with members of the Executive Committee of the Commission, the Mayor, City Manager, Chief of Police, and a few ranking officers. Mr. Phillips informed the group that Grand Rapids was included on the "dangerous list" established by the National Office of the Urban League and indicated particular concern in the lack of Negroes in the Police Department and other areas of city administration. Mayor Sonneveldt expressed his

⁸Grand Rapids Press, April 19, 1967, Doc. File No. 20.

⁹Eugene Sparrow, "Address to the Human Relations Conference," Kellogg Center, Michigan State University, June 3, 1967, Doc. File No. 20.

¹⁰Ed. Com., "Off. Min.," June 6, 1967.

optimism relative to the progress made in the city's racial climate and denied positively that riots were possible in the city. City Manager Nabers agreed with the Mayor's optimistic attitude, as did the majority of the Executive Committee.¹¹

Mr. Reginald Gatling, Director of the Kentfields Rehabilitation program of the Dyer-Ives Foundation, commenting on the Newark, New Jersey, riots, said about Grand Rapids: "There are more militants now than I've ever seen in my life." He added that the young Grand Rapids Negroes were "unsophisticated" when compared to those elsewhere.¹²

When extreme racial violence broke out in Detroit in July, 1967, the Grand Rapids police discovered no indication of local unrest. The Police, City Officials, and citizens in general were taken by surprise when the first violent disorders occurred at approximately 11:00 P.M., July 24, 1967--only twelve days after the Mayor, City Manager, and other public officials had denied positively that riots were possible in the city. The first reported incident involved a group of rock-throwing juveniles on South Division Avenue. The number and severity of the incidents increased throughout most of the night but there was clearly no organization or leadership directing the disturbances. The relative quiet on the morning of July 25th led the city authorities to believe that more destruction would take place later in the day.

¹¹Exec. Com., "Off. Min.," July 12, 1967.

¹²Mr. Reginald Gatling, as quoted in the Grand Rapids Press, July 21, 1967.

Several civic leaders, white and Negro, attempted to assess the danger; Negro ministers, teachers, and community leaders talked to groups of youths and encouraged them to avoid any action which might lead to a breakdown of law and order. Mr. Sparrow reported that extreme emotional tension was prevalent and that his blue car, similar in color to police cars, had been the target of rock attacks earlier in the day.

Disturbances began again in the afternoon and increased in number and severity as darkness approached. A few stores were set on fire and looted but many of the home-made fire bombs failed to ignite since few of the youths knew how to construct an effective "Molotov Cocktail." The Mayor and City Commission, meeting in emergency session, called on the Governor to declare a "state of emergency" for the city. The adjacent communities of East Grand Rapids and Wyoming followed suit. Governor George Romney's proclamation prohibited the sale of firearms or intoxicating liquors, including wine and beer, and limited the sale of gas between the hours of six in the evening and six in the morning and to motor vehicles only. It imposed a city-wide curfew on all persons from 10:00 P.M. to 5:30 A.M.

On the first night of the disturbance 17 persons were injured, 54 arrested, property loss estimated at \$8,000, and 11 fires attributed to arson. On the night of July 26th, 44 people were injured and 213 were arrested. The City Coach Lines, Inc., ceased all bus runs at 8:25 P.M. Most of the rioters were young people between the ages of 14 and 24 who were imitating events

taking place simultaneously in Detroit according to the detailed report of Mr. Sparrow and Mr. Gobucki. Police Chief Johnson also stated that few adults were involved as was evidenced by lack of leadership among the rioters. Small groups of 5 or 6 young adults ranged throughout the ghetto throwing rocks through windows, starting fires in vacant homes or, when possible, breaking into and looting the stores along Wealthy, Jefferson, and Division Avenues.

The Sheldon Complex "Task Force" was active during the entire period of disturbance. This group of young, Negro athletes mingled with the people in the streets preventing small, splinter groups from being organized into a single force. At the same time they aided tremendously in keeping the actual damage to a minimum. One Task Force member was wounded when the police mistook him for one of the rioters. All reports made after the riots praised the preventative work of the Task Force.

The Mayor, HRC Staff, and many Negro and white community leaders met with some of the self-appointed leaders of the riot on Wednesday afternoon (July 26th) at the House of Styles barber shop located in the center of the riot area. At this time the training and experience of those individuals who had participated in the SRI program of Police-Community relations paid great dividends. The House of Styles confrontation produced a new Negro Leadership Council (ultimately renamed the Black Unity Council) composed of members of the older, established leaders of the Negro community as well as some of the young militants with whom prior

direct communications had been conspicuously lacking. All members of this new group agreed that their first successful action took place that night; only a few very minor incidents took place because of the combined efforts of the new group, the Task Force, Police, and the positive assurances of Mayor Sonneveldt that the City Commission would listen to the voice of the total Black community rather than the few, "white-selected" leaders of the ghetto. As a result of the quiet evening, Mayor Sonneveldt lifted the curfew on Thursday night and by the end of the week the city returned to nearly normal condition.¹³

The July disturbances did not follow traditional patterns of race riots. In spite of the high ethnic population concentrations, there was little Negro-white confrontation. To be sure, one of the immediate results of the disturbances was the extensive arming by individuals within ethnic groups and much talk about what would happen if "they" invaded "our" area. This ethnic, attitudinal prejudice continued for a considerable length of time but never erupted into physical contact or violence. Blacks did not invade the traditional ethnic areas nor did whites roam in the Negro ghetto. Rather, the disturbances were recognized as part of the social revolution against poverty, housing, education, and unemployment. Since the vast majority of the participants in the disturbances were young people, ranging in age from fourteen to twenty-four, there was no evidence of any specific objective

¹³Eugene Sparrow, "Report on the Disturbances," Doc. File No. 20; See also: Grand Rapids Press, July 26-31, 1967.

or opposition save general dissatisfaction. The older and more established Negroes did not support the uprisings but helped greatly in maintaining law and order. Less than four percent of the Negro population was involved. On the other hand, the majority of the Negro population believed the disturbances served a definite and dramatic purpose insofar as they drew the attention of the white population to the conditions existing within the ghetto. A second major development was that the younger element of the lower, social-economic population had its voice heard by the rest of the community, especially the older and more established Negro population.¹⁴

¹⁴Dr. Homer A. Jack, Director, Commission on Religion and Race, Unitarian Universalist Association, Aug. 21, 1967; Michigan Civil Rights Commission: Letter: "Mayors, City Commissions, and Other Heads of Local Government," Sept. 26, 1967, Doc. File No. 20.

CHAPTER XIV

THE COMMISSION RECONSTITUTED

Many citizens blamed the Human Relations Commission for its failure to prepare the city for the racial uprising and charged it with lack of contact with the very groups it was supposed to represent. They accused the Commission of being a study group rather than an action agency. Mr. Hillman, Commission Chairman, claimed that once Mr. Sparrow had assumed leadership he had utilized the Commission to enhance his personal position.¹

Mr. Sparrow contended that the Commission and its committees were incapable of acting independently of its Director and should not act without keeping him informed. He had previously pointed out that the enabling ordinance of the Human Relations Commission contained no specific directions for the Executive Director. He had requested also that the Commission hire a professional intergroup consultant to evaluate the ordinance, the Commission and staff, and their activities. This study was made in June, 1967, prior to the riots, by Mr. Kenneth C. Jones, a long time member of the National Association of Intergroup Relations Officials (NAIRO). The final report arrived on July 25, 1967, during the

¹Executive Com., "Off. Min.," April 18, 1967.

racial disturbances, and consequently the Commission did not begin to consider it until late August.²

The Jones report found that none of the Commissioners believed that the Commission was performing an adequate job and that most of them did not even know the correct title of its Director. Many were not certain as to how many committees existed or the purpose and objectives of the committees other than the one on which they served. Few members understood how or why they received appointment to the Commission or exactly in what their duties and responsibilities consisted. Many city community leaders believed that the Commission was "an unnecessary instrument of city government," that some of the members lacked qualifying knowledge or experience for intergroup work, and that the Commission had ignored the needs of the minorities. Most non-whites believed that the Executive Director was merely "the Negro representative in the City Hall."

Mr. Jones reported that the entire program was "undefined and inadequate." His objection to the organizational structure centered on the fact that the Executive Director had to serve two masters, the Human Relations Commission and the City Manager. The Director's public image, and hence much of his public effectiveness, was dependent on his ability to satisfy the desires of the Commission. It expected him to set policies and direct committee

²Mr. K. C. Jones, "Report of the Human Relations Commission of the City of Grand Rapids," July 28, 1967, Doc. File No. 99.

activities while at the same time be responsive to the wishes of the Committee members. Above all, the Commission demanded that the Director was totally responsible to it alone in all his official activities. The Ordinance, however, established the Executive Director as a position within the civil service system and thereby directly dependent upon the City Commission and City Manager for promotion, staff and budget. Without sufficient staff and budget the Executive Director was limited severely and could not achieve the objective listed in the Ordinance.³

Mr. Jones recommended that the City Commission abolish the Human Relations Commission as presently established. He suggested further that the City Commission should create within the existing civil service structure a new position for an "Assistant City Manager for Human Relations," directly responsible and subordinate to the City Manager. This new executive should have an advisory citizen committee to reflect public attitudes. The new executive could utilize the expertise of the members of the advisory committee but as a department head of city government would not be subordinate to the committee. Finally, Mr. Jones observed that the city needed a stronger housing ordinance, should hire more minority personnel within city government, and should enforce the equal opportunity clauses in all city contracts.⁴

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

The Commission took no action on the Jones Report for several months, during which time Mr. Julian Orr became the new City Manager. The Commission was divided in its reaction to the Jones Report which irked some members who feared the loss of control over the Executive Director would necessarily result in the revised committee being a mere debating society. This minority group also felt that qualified citizens would not be willing to serve in this capacity. The majority of the commission members felt that implimentation of the report would end the confusion of responsibility, give the new Executive freedom to act, and that qualified citizens would be more willing to serve on a commission when action potential was greater.

Ultimately the City Commission, acting on the majority recommendation of the Human Relations Commission, modified the City Charter and established the Department of Human Relations. The revised ordinance ended the jurisdictional problem of the Executive Director by establishing him as one of the City Hall Department Heads who reported directly to the City Manager. Henceforth, the Director was at the same staff level as the heads of Police, Fire, Sanitation, or any other major division of city administration. The Human Relations Commission was reestablished as the Community Relations Commission and ceased to be an independent agency with power and authority separate and independent from the City Manager. The Commission as reestablished existed as an advisory group of citizens assisting the Department Head, and through him, the Mayor, City Manager, and the City Commission.

Thus, after a year of near total inactivity, the Commission came to an inglorious end.⁵

Under the revised ordinance the city's Director of Human Relations was assisted by a 15 member advisory citizens committee. The power and authority possessed by the defunct Human Relations Commission were not given to the Community Relations Commission. Most of the old HRC members were appointed to serve on the new CRC and the old committee structure retained. The effectiveness of the committees still depended on the directive leadership of the department head and the chairman of the individual committee. Unfortunately, Mr. Sparrow resigned to return to teaching very shortly after his transformation to department head status and the usual interim inactivity period followed. The next Head of the Department, Mr. Frank Gordon, proved too militant to please the members of either the City Commission or the Community Relations Committee. His resignation after two years began another interim period during which Mrs. Bobbie Butler served so effectively as acting head of the department for a year that she was appointed to the position permanently under civil service regulations. Mrs. Butler, assisted by very capable Commission chairmen and with the complete backing of the City Manager, made very effective use of her advisory citizens committee. The CRC under Mrs. Butler's leadership was largely responsible for the City Commission instituting an affirmative action program, hiring a greater proportion of

⁵Grand Rapids Ordinance Code, Article 3, Title I, Sec. 1.341-1.349, Revised July 3, 1968.

non-whites in City Hall, and other action programs which the HRC had failed to achieve. Her personal contacts with other department heads within city government definitely improved the racial attitudes in city administration and her continued cooperation with various civil and racial groups in the community led to improved communications between the city government and the citizens of Grand Rapids. The changes recommended by Mr. K. C. Jones, and adopted by the City Commission, had produced positive action programs by 1971.

CHAPTER XV

THE BALANCE SHEET

The Grand Rapids Human Relations Commission came into existence in April, 1955, after two years of prior study. The Commission's work in the early years concentrated on the problem of education of the city in the field of intergroup relations, attempting to impress city officials, church bodies, educational systems, and the community at large that definite minority problems existed among the Negro and Spanish-speaking citizens. For ten years the Commission made its voice heard relative to inequities existing in the areas of employment, civil and legal rights, education, and housing. The new state constitution of 1964 saw the State Civil Rights Commission assume the major responsibilities in the areas of employment and legal and civil rights.

The heavy increase of migration of non-whites and Spanish-speaking citizens from the Southern states progressively complicated the education and housing problems in a city, the citizens of which were ethnically orientated to reject the new arrivals as belonging to a lower socio-economic class which could not be merged into the established cultural pattern. The successful activities of the Commission were restricted by this real, but unspoken, psychological racism. This condition was not unique in Grand Rapids but generally

intensified by the solidity of ethnic prejudice, both intellectually and geographically.

The Commission's greatest accomplishment was the rapport it established with the Board of Education and the Grand Rapids Real Estate Board. The professional educators at first feared the Commission would attempt to dictate concepts and policies which might be educationally unsound and only gradually was the Board convinced that there existed with the Commission an identity of interests. No panacea was developed for de facto segregation but the issue was faced squarely and solutions sought and tried. The most notable failure of the Commission was its deliberate policy of non-involvement with non-public school systems which housed 40% of all the students in the city, the highest percentage of any city in Michigan.

The Human Relations Commission had remarkable success in its relations with the Real Estate Board, as evidenced in the adoption of the open housing ordinance in 1963 and the progressive modifications which followed. Internal limitations of the ordinance weakened its applicability but paved the way for a new, effective and comprehensive ordinance of December, 1967. The neighborhood stabilization programs in areas contiguous and non-contiguous to the ghetto were generally successful and made possible by the active cooperation of the Real Estate Board. Rarely, if ever, has a municipal human relations commission received as much assistance or encouragement as was extended by the local real estate organization to the Grand Rapids Human Relations Commission.

The most obvious failure of the Commission was its inability to develop low-cost, minority housing. The Commission alone was not responsible for this failure since the citizenry generally was antagonistic to both private and public housing programs which might (and necessarily would) involve tax increase. The actuality of low cost housing for the aged and minority people did not appear any closer in August, 1967, than it had a decade earlier.

The Commission achieved considerable success in many peripheral areas of intergroup relations, such as the "Big Brother" program, employment of minorities in unskilled jobs, and, prior to 1965, in establishing good community communications. The controversy between the Commission and the City Government pertaining to jurisdiction over the Executive Director, and the negative effects produced by the Adler Report on the employment and promotional practices of the City Hall, caused the Commission to lose much of its stature. The Jones Report indicated clearly the dichotomy between the Commission and the City Government and the consequent necessity for revision of the enabling ordinance.

The disturbances of July, 1967, dramatized the needs and the desires of the population within the inner city. The new Negro Leadership Council (Black Unity Council) presented thirty-one specific demands involving the areas of city administration, police, education, housing, and employment. Many of these demands could not be met immediately; a few were acted upon quickly.

In the spring of 1968 the first Negro City Commissioner was elected. Rev. Lyman Parks, Pastor of the first Community A.M.E.

Church, took office in May, 1968, and by his presence brought direct communication from the inner city to the City Commission. The new City Manager, Mr. Julian Orr, in one of his first public statements, claimed that the most pressing and serious problem requiring his attention was the plight of the non-white minority. Mr. Orr was responsible to a great degree for the ordinance change as recommended in the Jones Report. Finally, the appointment of Rev. Harold Dekker of Calvin College Seminary as Chairman of the revised Commission augured progress. Capable, affable and available, Rev. Dekker found his first task was to find a replacement for Mr. Sparrow who resigned on July 1, 1968, to return to full time college teaching. Mr. Boguki served as interim director until a new Executive Director could be found.

It is, of course, impossible to predict the future of the Community Relations Commission as an unofficial advisor to a department head in city government. The old Commission had served the city for fifteen years; it pointed with pride to some areas of success and admitted to areas of failure. The generally held concept of "gradualism" deominated the Negro community in 1954; the concept of "immediatism" was dominant in 1967. The growth of "Black Power" in all of its aspects indicated that the city had entered into an entirely new era in the field of intergroup relations which required new approaches and new techniques. The Human Relations Commission had served its purpose; a new type of commission was required to meet the new conditions.

To conclude that the Human Relations Commission was a total failure would be neither just or honest; to consider it an unqualified

success would be imprudent and false. Like so many intergroup agencies, the Commission did its task as it understood the task at the time. At the very least, the Commission provided an arena where spokesmen for various groups could attempt to reconcile differences short of group confrontation. The Commission was the city's lightning rod during an electrical storm. The future must develop its own principles and organizations to cope with recent events and developments. What the HRC should, or might have done is a moot question. The chief problems of all minority groups in 1968 were the same as they were in 1954; namely, housing, health, recreation, employment, and education. The experiences of the Grand Rapids Human Relations Commission, its success and its failures, may and should serve in the ultimate solutions to these complex problems. Truly, it was another "noble experiment."

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

The essence of this study is found in the Official Records of the City of Grand Rapids, Michigan. While most of the records are available upon request, those of individual departments of city government are in no sense complete or properly organized for general research. The City of Grand Rapids does not have an official historian, or any other agent, responsible for the preservation of historical documents. Requests to the Mayor and the City Commission for the establishment of such a position have been made several times but the mere acknowledgement of need has produced as yet no positive response. The Grand Rapids Historical Commission, established in 1961 to write the history of the city, has no authority whatsoever to recommend the preservation of documents having historical value.

The most complete and valuable single primary source relating to the background of the Grand Rapids Human Relations Commission is, beyond doubt, "The Report to the Grand Rapids City Commission by the Grand Rapids Study Commission on Human Relations" (Doc. File No. 29, July 31, 1954). It covered the major topics of Employment, Housing, Education, Health and Recreation, and Police. The "Study Report" has special value insofar as it was prepared and submitted before the most serious racial problems even existed within the city and when the non-white ratio was extremely low.

The actual sequence of activities of the Human Relations Commission from establishment until its reorganization in 1967 is best covered in the "Official Minutes" of the Commission. They are supplemented by the minutes of the committees, especially those on Executive, Education and Housing. Reports of the other committees are often incomplete or non-existent. The indispensable role of the Executive Director appears in his office correspondence and in such ephemeral reports as the "Tenure of Office" report of the Acting Executive Director, Mr. Joseph Zainea (Doc. File No. 84, Sept. 1, 1961) and Mr. Alfred Cowles' talk given at his retirement dinner (Doc. File No. 72, Jan. 27, 1966).

The Adler Report, "A Study of Fair Employment Practices in City Government" (Doc. File No. 32, Aug., 1966), must be recognized as one of the major documents in this total study. Counter balancing this study is the subsequent special report of the Human Relations Commission's Ad Hoc committee on the same subject. The "Mustache Incident," as reported in the Hall Report (Doc. File No. 107, Sept., 1966), is a major issue relating to the existing racial problems in the Public Schools. This report should be considered as direct background material for Mr. Eugene Sparrow's "Report on Disturbances" (race riots) of July 24-27, 1967 (Doc. File No. 20). Contrasts should be made of these reports and the denial of any possibility of potential flare-ups which were made two weeks previously by the Mayor, City Commissioners, and others to the report of Mr. Paul Phillips, Executive Director of the local branch of the Urban League (Off. Min., July 12, 1967).



Finally, the special twenty page report of Mr. Kenneth C. Jones (Doc. File No. 99, July 6, 1967) entitled "Report on the Human Relations Commission of the City of Grand Rapids" is of particular interest and importance. Mr. Jones, a long time member of NAIRO, explained in his report the dichotomy which existed between the Human Relations Commission and the city government and concluded with the recommendation the abolition of the Human Relations Commission and the substitution therefor of an Assistant City Manager for Human Relations.

Other major sources of importance were the files of the Grand Rapids Press, the only daily paper which existed during the entire period. These files are presently available on microfilm in the Grand Rapids Ryerson Public Library. The Official files of the Michigan Civil Rights Commission located in Lansing, Michigan, and the files of the Detroit Commission for Community Relations provide valuable materials. Both agencies published regular news letters containing brief reports and comments relative to intergroup activities at state and local levels. Of similar nature, but more detailed in scope, are the files and publications of NAIRO.

Many state and municipal human relations organizations published regular reports, some of which provide information relative to activities and problems in other areas. Especially worthy of note is the publication of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, "Human Relations" (Toronto, 1962 to present). This excellent bimonthly report contained many articles on the general

dynamics of community relations. Other similar major publications are those of the Newark Human Rights Commission, The Chicago Human Relations Commission and the Dayton (Ohio) Human Relations Commission. The "Race Relations Reporter" published in Nashville, Tenn., is a non-partisan, non-profit agency which collects and disseminates twice monthly various materials on racial and ethnic minorities in the U.S.

For specific information relating to problems of minority education from 1962 to the present there is available the "Annual Reports of the National Conference on Civil and Human Rights in Education," NEA Center for Human Relations, Washington, D.C. L. Laurenti's Property Values and Race Studies in Seven Cities (U. of Calif. Press, Berkeley, 1960), is still the classic work in the field of interracial housing. Two older, but still valuable, secondary works on organization, activities and potentials of Human Relations Commissions are J.P. Dean & A. Rosen's A Manual of Intergroup Relations (U. of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1955) and P. H. Rossi's "Theory, Research, and Practice in Community Organization" contained in Charles R. Adnoi's Social Science and Community Action (Michigan State University Press, East Lansing, 1960).

Several elected city officials who served during the fifteen year period of the Human Relations Commission were interviewed, as were many Chairmen of City Departments. For the most part these interviews merely confirmed documented material or

expressed already known personal opinions. No reference whatsoever was found in the national periodicals or major newspapers, such as the New York Times, which referred specifically to the Grand Rapids Human Relations Commission.

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