

How Much Of Racial Inequity Can Negroes Overcome?

By BILL CONVER
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Mrs. Maggie Carter and other ladies in Peoria's Negro community charge the Negro people of this city with the necessity of picking up the responsibility for not only improving their own lot, but that of Peoria as a whole.

Carl T. Rowan, award-winning correspondent and author, claimed in a recent story in the Saturday Evening Post that Negro leaders are reluctant to pick up this responsibility because they claim society is to blame for the Negro's plight.

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Rowan also intimates that Negroes feel that those who talk most about crime and immorality in the Negro community are less concerned about improving the situation than they are in proving that the Negro is unfit for first class citizenship.

This must be the answer then to the question of why so few replied when the Journal Star asked for help in finding out what Negroes could do to help themselves here.

It is obvious, however, that the blame must be shared.

For instance, there is the charge that Negroes do not get all the education they can, and yet there is not a Negro teacher

in our high schools with whom a Negro student can identify himself.

Employers are charged with discrimination against Negro applicants, and their answer is that Negro applicants cannot qualify for some of their jobs because of lack of education.

The Peoria Human Relations Commission was told early this year by Aimee Isgrig, executive director of the Illinois Human Relations Commission, that it must not discriminate against youth and should organize some kind of a teenage commission to work with it, but the Peoria Commission has not yet made much of a move toward establishing such a youth branch.

Rowan and others say that Negro responsibility will rise in direct ratio to the rise of Negro opportunities and freedoms.

In Peoria, Negroes have the opportunity of getting an education, but their record for doing that is not good, if a look at the senior classes of our three public high schools for the last 10 years is a good criterion.

Manual, Central and Woodruff have seen less than 300 Negro boys and girls in their senior classes in the past 10 years. The method of finding this out was not an exact one. Cards of high

school students are not marked to indicate race, so a glance at the yearbooks starting with 1951 was indicated.

The search turned up approximately 272 Negro seniors in the 10 years. The score sheet showed 98 for Manual, 133 for Central and 41 for Woodruff. A few more could be added at the Academy of Our Lady and Spalding

These figures do not perhaps mean much. Without much more research, the rate of dropout cannot be determined for Negroes.

One thing is certain, however. Considering our Negro population to be about 10 per cent of the city's total, the Negro part of the

community is not furnishing its 10 per cent of the graduating classes of our three public high schools.

As of Oct. 7 there were 804 students in the senior classes of our three public high schools. If there are the same number of Negro seniors as last June—35— it figures out to slightly over 4 per cent of the combined senior classes.

Looking over the whole picture of high school enrollment we find 1,209 freshmen, 1,043 sophomores and 836 juniors. It is easy to see that between freshman and sophomore and between sophomore and junior years, the dropout is about 200 a

year. How many are Negroes, we do not know, but somewhere along the line they get discouraged.

The general question from Negro students is, "What good does it do us to finish high school if we can't get a job and make a good living anyway?"

The reverse question, of course, is, "What good does it do you to quit? . . . and . . . How do you know it will not do you any good to finish high school unless you accomplish it?"

In the area of crime it is perfectly apparent that crimes are committed by individuals . . . not by groups. And if police statistics are based solely on arrests, it

must be also apparent that what happens to a drunken crap shooter on Monson street is quite different from what happens to a drunken crap shooter on Grand View drive or the Country Club of Peoria.

Negro leaders admit that a certain portion of their race has fallen into the habit of using the color of their skin as an alibi for failure at one thing or another. But this is not surprising considering the record of abuse, brutality hung up against the race in this country.

Detective Nolan Macklin, a veteran of the Peoria police force, and Henry Harper, director of

Carver Community Center, perhaps have the answer.

They agree that it is fitting and proper for Negroes to campaign as a group for rights and freedoms in the areas of education, job opportunities, religion, recreation and housing.

"But in the final analysis," they say, "Negroes must gain understanding, respect and advancement as individuals . . . not as members of a minority group."

Perhaps that is why this particular Journal Star investigation failed. We all are members of one group or another, but we live, think and react as individuals.