

Human Relations Report Cites Negro Gains Here

By THEO JEAN KENYON

Segregation isn't confined to below the Mason-Dixon line—a fact many Northerners often overlook.

One group that does not is the Illinois Commission on Human Relations which has just issued its eighth biennial report based largely on the work of 26 local councils like the Peoria area one.

TALKING ABOUT human relations is one thing, working them out at the grass roots level is something else and the Peoria council points out that "in a quiet unobtrusive way" it has made some gains.

"They said it couldn't be done," says Sam Belfer, chairman of the community action committee, but since 1950 in Peoria:

- 16 non-white teachers have been employed in public schools

...st rates of vandalism in housing records.

- A Negro moved into an all-white neighborhood on the West Bluff without incident.

Beyond these items Belfer says that more important there is "a completely different attitude and many employers and merchants are realizing that 10,000 people mean a lot of business."

ONE AREA IN which Peoria Council on Human Relations has yet to find a positive solution is breaking up of the so-called "black belt" of Peoria.

Little change has occurred since 1955 when a University of Illinois survey showed that Carver Community which occupies three per cent of the total area of Peoria contains 14 and one-half per cent of the total population of the city.

The overcrowding that results still spawns the majority of the human relations problems which the Council tries to solve.

IN ITS EIGHTH report since the overall Illinois Commission was created in 1943, the Commission stresses that while it is not empowered to administer or enforce Civil Rights laws, nor even to recommend legislation—it does act as a watchdog for violations, and a "reminder" of the law.

One of these is the 1874 statute prohibiting segregation in the public schools of Illinois.

Reinforced by the 1949 "Jenkins Amendment" which denies state financial aid to schools which segregate students on the basis of race, color or nationality, the statute is pretty effective.

NOT ENOUGH, however, to prevent the continuation of 67 all-Negro grade schools and seven all-Negro high schools, all due to housing patterns. The Commission now must turn to the housing pattern.

Most of the state, like Peoria, has made gains in the hiring of Negro teachers since 1950. That year Negro teachers were employed only in Chicago. Today the Commission reports 31 Illinois cities employ Negro teach-

In one other area the Commission also feels it has made progress.

"Non-whites in Illinois, as compared with those in the country as a whole, have comparatively higher incomes, a higher percentage in white collar or "high status" jobs, and a lower percentage of their women in the labor force."

The Commission adds that they also have a higher rate of unemployment, "to a large degree these differences can be attributed to the fact that non-white agricultural workers in Illinois are relatively small."

IN TERMS OF income non-whites in Chicago also rank "relatively high" when compared to their counterparts in the largest metropolitan areas of the nation," the report adds.

Dr. William O'Neill, minister of Westminster Presbyterian Church, who is a member of the Illinois Commission on Human Relations sums up the Commission's work when he says:

"We move in a quiet unobtrusive way to promote and encourage interfaith and inter-racial harmony and good will."

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