

V.F. Peo Negro 4-8-57

The Story Of The Negro In Peoria --- Chapter 1

J-S A.M. 4-5-57
This is the first of a series of eight searching articles about the Negro in Peoria; where he works, what he does, how he lives, how he is received, and the opportunities he finds in Peoria.

By BILL CONVER

History sometimes crawls, sometimes gallops and sometimes charges forward with alarming pace, but the pace of the Negro through the history of the United States seems to be a fluctuating thing.

Erratic and unpredictable at times, portentous and steady at others, we find the present situation, not only in the country but here in Peoria hard to analyze from past performances.

Before looking forward it is not a bad idea to take sharp scrutiny of the path behind.

At the present time the Negro population of the

United States is more than 15 million and will probably form about 10 or 11 per cent of the total population.

In Peoria a 1954 survey put the Negro population at 8.3 per cent of the total. As of now it probably runs closer to 9 or 10 per cent and if such is the case there are probably 12,000 to 14,000 in Peoria proper.

The increase in the number in the last five years has been tremendous, but this fact only reflects what has been happening in the United States since about the time of the First World War.

In colonial America, Negroes formed about 20 per cent of the population and among them were a half million free Negroes.

In 1890 the Negro group was about 75 per cent rural. In 1950 that had changed to over 61 per cent urban. The

race has been shifting from the country to the city steadily in our nation.

It has also been restless and shifting since the first World War, moving north and west, generally speaking, away from the southern states where the marks of slavery of several centuries still lie heavy on the minds of the people.

Recent tensions in the larger cities of the South are likely to speed up this shift still further. The effects of the shift are being felt here in Peoria at any rate.

Mrs. Ethel Pearl, 1011 W. Second Ave., a housewife who is a member of the board at Carver Center, past chairman of the Council of Church Women and is a member of the mayor's Human Relations Council, remembers that in 1926 there were only three or four thousand Negroes in Peoria.

Taking a 14,000 total for the present, you can readily see the increase. And a large part of this increase has come since 1943.

What about the results of this redistribution?

On the good side nationally, it has resulted in improved school and employment facilities, political voting power and new cultural incentives.

On the bad side can readily be seen such things as low grade housing, overcrowding, increased community tensions, occasional riots in larger cities and extensive unemployment and relief during depressions and even short industrial layoffs.

In the next story, we will attempt to draw some kind of a picture of the Negro in Peoria politics and government.