

Civil Rights-Gains Indicated By Progress Made

The Negro can rightly assert that he does not enjoy all his rights as an American citizen, but at the same time he can boast that he has made no small amount of progress in those respects which constitute civic advancement. Measured by the rights he has gained and those seemingly within his grasp in the not too far future, he is more of an American citizen now than he was fifty years ago.

VOTING

A CITIZEN without suffrage in a democracy is an anomaly, because he is deprived of one of his most important privileges. Perhaps the main object of the South during the hectic days of Reconstruction times was to handicap the Negro by keeping the ballot out of his hands, in spite of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments. KKK white sheets and cross bones and skulls warnings made Negroes afraid even to go to the polls; while unfair educational tests and "grandfather clause" laws secured the desire of the South to have lily-white elections.

But by 1917 the United States Supreme Court by declaring "grandfather clause" laws unconstitutional, had started the assault on the designed and determined effort to permanently disfranchise Negroes. The decision of the United States Supreme Court in the Texas primary cases holding "white primaries" to be unconstitutional, the ruling of Judge J. Waites in South Carolina that qualified Negroes must be permitted to vote in Democratic primaries regardless of any legislative action to abrogate state regulation of primaries, and the favorable outcome of suits brought by Negroes in other states have resulted in Negroes in the South going to the polls in unprecedented numbers. In 1947 it is estimated that 645,000 Southern Negroes voted. One million voted in the 1948 national election.

OFFICE HOLDING

DURING the first twenty years after Emancipation Negro sheriffs, county clerk, county school superintendents, secretaries of state, and members of the legislature were numerous in the South. Then the angry tide of "white supremacy," fearful of "Negro domination," swiftly swept Negroes out of office. The carpet-bagger went and calmer days came, and with the possible resurgence of democracy an increasing number of Negroes are being placed in both elective and appointive office—members of boards of education, city councilmen, policemen, state legislatures even in Southern cities considered almost ultra-conservative.

While a list of many of the Negroes who have held responsible offices in the last fifty years might be helpful to some, it can be said that the large number and the efficient service they rendered indicate definite civic advancement. As the years have been passing, the demand of the Negro for representation on policy-making groups has been increasingly

met. No full measure of citizenship is enjoyed by a people who collectively are required to comply with policies always made by others, but are themselves consistently denied a voice in determining those policies.

HOUSING

CIVIC PROGRESS or the lack of it reflects itself in the homes of the people. Referring to the 1940 census because data obtained by the last census are not yet available, ten years ago 23 per cent of all Negro families were living in their own homes; and these homes were valued at nearly \$900,000,000. A reliable approximation may be that against 750,000 Negro-owned homes today there were 450,000 fifty years ago.

In housing the Negro's problem of carrying more easily the responsibility of paying for his home because of his low-income status has been aggravated by the American pattern of segregated residential communities and blocks. For years this housing pattern was preserved by custom and municipal ordinances. Municipal ordinances were first attacked in a way to attract national interest when the city of Louisville passed an ordinance which expressly forbade a Negro occupying a home in a so-called white block. In what is often called the William Warley case, the United States Supreme Court in 1917 declared such ordinances unconstitutional in that they were unwarranted use of the "police power" and in violation of the fourteenth amendment.

To defeat any changes which the Warley case decision might bring about, advocates of residential segregation resorted to "restrictive covenants" which meant to confine Negroes, Jews and other minority groups to racial ghettos through the written agreement of white property owners not to sell or rent to members of the prescribed nationalities. By 1924, fifteen southern states were upholding restrictive covenants; but in 1948, the United States Supreme Court ruled that federal and state

courts cannot enforce such agreements. The fight on this front is not yet won, but it is a part of the civic gains of the Negro.

Federal housing, although it is still posing some problems, is improving the life of the Negro as a citizen in that it is providing him not only cheaper and more attractive living conditions but also both physically and morally cleaner environments.

EDUCATION

Educational facilities for Negroes today are conceded to be better than they were a half century ago. Even with the retention of segregation the reduction of the number of one-room schools, the improvement of school buildings, the erection of more modern school houses, and the raising of the standard of teacher qualification with larger salaries for teachers mark progress.

Separate schools on the elementary and secondary level are the rule, and are generally tolerated though not conceded to be the democratic thing. Attack, which can almost be called violent, has been made on segregation in higher education. Effort to break down the color bar in state-supported colleges and universities began a little more than ten years ago with a suit against the University of Maryland which was won and has made it possible for several Negroes to graduate from that institution's Law School.

But the outstanding cases are those of Lloyd Gaines in Missouri, Ada Lois Sipuel case in Oklahoma, Heman Sweatt case in Texas, and Lyman Johnson case in Kentucky. The heart of each supreme court ruling in these cases has been that Negroes must be admitted to white universities unless the state provides for them equal facilities in separate schools. Negroes are determined that they will accept nothing short of absolutely equal facilities in separate schools; meanwhile several of the southern states are throwing open the

doors of their white universities to Negroes. Kentucky is a splendid example, where the University of Kentucky, the University of Louisville, Berea college and several other schools are enrolling Negro students.

TRAVELING without barriers and embarrassment on account of color is another thing that must be achieved in our fight for full citizenship. Segregation on trains, buses, steamers, and in waiting rooms has been imposed on Negroes so long and consistently that they had come to think it was universal law except in the North. They were disillusioned by the Irene Morgan case which led the United States Supreme Court to decision that segregation of persons on buses in interstate travel on account of race or color is unconstitutional. A recent Supreme Court ruling will be the beginning of the end of discrimination in dining cars.

EMPLOYMENT is a basic matter with any people. In "What the Negro Wants," a book which came out six years ago to give the opinions of thirteen of the most outstanding race leaders, A. Philip Randolph who has devoted his life to the improvement of the industrial and economic condition of the Negro said, "No greater wrong has been committed against the Negro than the denial to him of the right to work. This question of the right to work is tied up with the right to live."

Fifty years ago, which was thirty-five years after the end of the Civil War, the Negro had lost many of the occupations upon which he had up to this time held a monopoly. The problem was to regain lost ground. He did get employment in a few fields new to such a worker, but the progress was slow and discouraging until it was stepped up by a threatened "March on Washington," energized by Mr. Randolph while President F. D. Roosevelt was worrying with the problem of manpower needed for the war.

As a result of this threat of demonstration against discrimination in industry, Mr. Roosevelt issued the order which set up the Fair Employment Commission whose business was to do what it found possible to end or reduce "discrimination in employment of workers in defense industries or government because of race, creed, color, or national origin."

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