

'60s saw blacks push for racial justice in C-U

In January, 1959, Donald E. Moyers, then chairman of the Champaign Human Relations Commission, warned the Champaign - Urbana Ministerial Association:

"By keeping better employment closed, we force better citizens to go to other cities and lose this type of community leadership that we need so badly."

Almost 10 years later the Survey Research Laboratory at the University of Illinois released its "Census of Black Families in Champaign - Urbana," cautiously estimating that not only had the number of blacks 15 and older failed to increase over the 4,000 here in 1960, but possibly had even decreased.

Although only the results of the 1970 census can confirm or disprove this hypothesis, the growth rate of Champaign - Urbana's adult

black community does not seem to have kept pace with that of the white.

If this proves to be the case, it will be a sharp contrast with previous decades, such as the 1940's when the black population rose 81 per cent or the 1950's, which showed an increase of 51 per cent.

As in 1959, moreover, the loss of better educated and better trained blacks remains a major concern in 1969.

Not that there haven't been changes over the past 10 years. But in the opinions of many young blacks, at least, employment, housing, and other opportunities still lag behind those in other communities.

One of the first manifestations of impending changes occurred on April 6, 1961, with the opening of the new J. C. Penney Co. store in downtown Champaign.

As the Courier described it at that time:

One in a series of Courier articles placing in perspective the changes the Soaring '60s brought to Champaign-Urbana and East Central Illinois.

"One incident did, however, mar the opening, for about five Negroes were picketing the store."

The demonstration, led by ministers from the black community, was aimed at the store's failure to hire black sales personnel, a policy then followed by many other downtown merchants.

Breakthrough

The pickets were withdrawn three weeks later, and a short time thereafter it was announced that the store had hired a black sales clerk.

A number of other businesses apparently followed suit.

Out of the picketing emerged the Champaign-Urbana Improvement Association, which over the next several years actively pushed for better treatment of blacks in a wide variety of areas.

Its activities culminated in 1964 when with the local NAACP youth chapter and Central Illinois Friends of SNCC it began demonstrations at the offices of the Champaign County Board of Realtors, seeking an end to all discrimination in housing.

A sit-in at board offices resulted in the arrest of 17 persons.

The first half of the decade also saw the establishment of such traditional civil rights organizations as the Urban League and a Champaign County chapter of the NAACP, although a student chapter had existed previously at the U. of I.

Hollow victory

Blacks also were elected to both city councils, Kenneth Stratton in 1961 in Champaign and Paul Hursay in 1965 in Urbana.

But often this seemed a hollow victory. In 1963, for example, the Champaign City Council defeated an open housing ordinance 6-1 with Stratton casting the only affirmative vote.

At the same meeting the



Picketing of Penney's in 1961 marked beginning of local civil rights militancy

council also defeated a policy statement, pledging non-discrimination in handling patients at Burnham Hospital by an identical 6-1 vote.

These defeats precipitated a sit-in in the Champaign city building and various marches and protest demonstrations.

In 1965 a large number of U. of I. students and local residents traveled to Washington, D.C. and Alabama to participate in marches and other civil rights projects.

But December of that year brought a new development on the home front, the so-called Spotlight Cafe incident in which blacks pelted police with bricks and other ob-

jects outside the Spotlight Cafe in Champaign's northeast neighborhood, injuring three policemen, one critically.

Threat of violence

Thenceforth, the threat of violence became more immediate. And although non-violent tactics were still employed, as in the 1967 boycott of Champaign stores to force integration of Unit 4 schools, the possibility of violence seemed to add an extra dimension to such activities.

This manifested itself in spring, 1968, when blacks were pressing the Champaign City Council for a strong open housing ordinance, a

prime goal of Stratton when he served on the council in the early 1960's.

This time however, the demands were accompanied with dire warnings of what could happen if the ordinance were defeated.

The council subsequently passed the strongest open housing ordinance in the state. But the fact that it seemed to take more than non-violent measures was not lost on local blacks.

Police and courts

In the past year one of the greatest concerns has been the county legal system and treatment of blacks by both police and courts.

The death of John Cushingberry, a black prisoner in county jail last May, touched off a week of disturbances that included apparent arson at several construction companies.

It also led to wide-spread requests for a professional study of the jail and other aspects of local law enforcement.

Chief Circuit Court judge Birch E. Morgan finally authorized a private study of the jail. But the results have yet to be released.

The past summer also saw a new outbreak of hostilities between rival youth groups. Several apparent bystanders, including one young girl and a woman, were injured by gun fire.

One Champaign fireman also was slightly injured when struck by a shotgun pellet while fighting a fire in a former grocery store at 204 E. Washington St., then being used as headquarters for a youth employment project.

Control difficult

An attempt was made to unite the various factions as the Mighty, Mighty Peace Stones. But the coalition was short-lived.

The gang warfare, however, created wide-spread terror in the black community, where many residents reportedly still fear going out after dark.

In part the disproportionate number of young persons has made it extremely difficult for the black community to control such problems themselves.

In the past year, therefore, employment, always a prime concern in the struggle for black rights, received add-

ed emphasis with demands for "affirmative action" ordinances in both Champaign and Urbana.

These ordinances would require most firms doing business with the city not only to employ blacks on a non-discriminatory basis, but also to recruit, train, and promote minority group members.

Champaign passed such an ordinance earlier this month, while Urbana's is still in a city council committee.

Black Coalition

In other employment activities, a number of groups that had been active in the field banded together as the Black Action Council for United Progress, commonly called the Black Coalition, to open more construction jobs and union membership to blacks.

In September, the group picketed the construction site of the Foreign Languages Building and later last fall barred workers from the Intramural Building construction site to seek reinstatement of a black brickmason who had been discharged.

Although major emphasis seemed to be on providing more entry-level and blue collar positions, the shortage of black professionals still was of concern.

Groups like the Urban League and Economic Opportunity Council, Champaign County's official anti-poverty agency, found themselves hard-pressed in filling director posts.

In the Urban League's case, Vernon Barkstall, who left a year ago to become executive director of the Lake County Urban League, returned to succeed Paul Keys, who had served as director only a few months.

Thomas Reeves, meanwhile, former director of an anti-poverty program in Missouri, became head of the EOC, replacing Henry Curtis who resigned to begin law school.

Howard Mitchell also was named to fill the Champaign city community relations officer post, a position created more than a year ago.

Urban renewal

At the end of the decade housing still presented a major problem for local blacks.

Eventually, Champaign's project I urban renewal area

Some turned to violence

(Continued From Page 3)

will provide about 100 additional units over the 250 that were there when work was begun.

But so far only a few single-family homes have been built. During 1969 lots were sold for about two dozen more and work was begun on the 72-unit North Mount Olive Manor.

But the Champaign County Housing Authority still has to pick a developer for the 120-units of public housing contracted for several years ago, 60 units in the urban renewal area and another 60 on North Harris Avenue.

During the year, the Concerned Citizens Committee joined forces with Interfaith Housing to sponsor a 116-unit development in the northwest corner of the urban renewal area.

The Champaign City Council, meanwhile, approved an application for \$640,000 in federal funds to begin planning renewal work in the 160 acres south of the first project and north of University Avenue.

Rising costs

As a result of relocation from the first project area, however, large numbers of blacks found homes in various parts of the city.

But like white residents they became increasingly hampered by sharply rising building costs and rising interest rates.

One hope for bettering the black community disappeared in 1969 with the closing of OUR Cooperative Grocery Store, the victim of internal dissension and gang violence that scared off white customers.

Besides integration in housing, the 1960's also brought integration in area schools.

In 1967 District 116 began

busing students from Hays School, then predominantly black, to other schools in the district.

The following year Unit 4 began a similar busing program, turning Washington School, which had been predominantly black, into a laboratory school.

500 program

Even the University of Illinois actively sought more black and other disadvantaged students, launching its Special Educational Opportunities Project in 1968.

This program, commonly called the "500 Program" because of the number of participants during its first year, gained wide notoriety in September, 1968, after more than 200 enrollees were arrested during a demonstration at the Illini Union over confu-

sion in housing arrangements, financial aid, and other matters.

Although one of the prime objectives of integration had been improving the quality of education available to black children, a number of blacks remained unconvinced as the decade closed that such educational needs were being met, if only because teachers failed to take into account the different backgrounds of black and poor white students.

And although integration seemed to be opening more opportunities for blacks in housing, education and employment, it also tended to disperse the black community, making resident control over the neighborhood school and other institutions more difficult, if not impossible.