

HEARING BEFORE THE ILLINOIS STATE COMMISSION
ON THE CONDITION OF THE URBAN COLORED POPULATION

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The hearing was called to order at 10:30 o'clock A. M., on Saturday, January the 4th A. D., 1941 - by the Chairman, SENATOR WILLIAM A. WALLACE, of Chicago - pursuant to adjournment - in the Council Chambers, City Hall, Chicago, Illinois.

PRESENT:

*(same as at previous hearing 1/3/41)

ABSENT:

*(same as at previous hearing 1/3/41)

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SEN. WALLACE: The Secretary will call the roll of the Commission.

(roll call of members of Commission)

SEN. WALLACE: The Secretary will call the roll of witnesses to appear this morning.

(roll call of witnesses)

SEN. WALLACE: For the benefit of the public and the witnesses who were not here yesterday, I will read the Bill that was passed creating the present Commission:

Senate Bill Number #468 - Approved July 1st, 1939 - AN ACT to create a commission to inquire into present conditions and to make recommendations to the General Assembly to improve the

economic, cultural, health and living conditions of the Urban colored population of the State of Illinois, and to make an appropriation for the expenses of such commission.

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois, represented in the General Assembly:

SECTION I There is hereby created a State Commission to consist of five senators, to be appointed by the President of the Senate, five members of the House of Representatives, and three members of the state at large, to be appointed by the Governor, at least two of the members of the commission to be of the colored race, which commission shall inquire into and report upon the economic, cultural, health and living conditions of the urban colored population of the State, and to make recommendations to the Sixty-Second General Assembly before March 1st, 1941, to improve such conditions as it may find and to secure to the urban colored population of the State an equal opportunity for support and economic and cultural development to the extent that such opportunity does not exist.

SECTION II The commission shall select a chairman and secretary from its members. It may employ counsel and such assistants as may be needed and may fix the compensation of such counsel and assistants within the amounts made available by the appropriation therefore. The members of such commission shall not receive any compensation for their services other than necessary expenses.

The commission may meet at any place within the state, may summon witnesses, and require the production of books, records and papers, may take testimony and order depositions taken.

SECTION III The sum of Ten Thousand (\$10,000.00) Dollars, or so much thereof as may be necessary, is hereby appropriated for the expenses of such commission. Such moneys shall be paid by the Treasurer on the warrant of the Chairman of the commission.

SEN. WALLACE: We want to say further that we are not concerned with, or interested in the politics or the political affiliations of anyone, we are here simply to obtain facts with relation to the program that is outlined in the Bill, so the witnesses will please govern themselves accordingly. Call your first witness .

MR. HAREWOOD: Horace R. Cayton.

SEN. WALLACE: Mr. Cayton, will you step forward please, and take that seat right there.

MR. HAREWOOD: Raise your right hand, please.

H O R A C E R. C A Y T O N

called as a witness, having been first duly sworn, was examined in chief by Mr. Harewood, and testified as follows:

MR. HAREWOOD: Will you state your full name, please ?

A Horace R. Cayton.

MR. HAREWOOD: What is your official capacity ?

A I am Director of the Good Shepherd Community Center,
5120 South Parkway, Chicago.

Q How long have you been thus engaged ?

A Just about a (1) year.

Q And what is your Chicago address ?

A 5120 South Parkway.

Q Prior to that, what sort of work have you done ?

A I was connected with the University of Chicago for five
(5) years in the Research Department.

Q Thank you, have a seat.

SENATOR WALLACE: Mr. Caton, I wish you would make a
statement explaining the effect of restrictive covenants on
rentals in the Negro community, and indicate, from your
experience, what the major problems are with respect to
securing adequate housing in the Negro community.

A I think that in general to speak of the housing program
or housing problem in Chicago as it effects the group, is to
consider it both economically and racially.

It is economical - rather economic, in that it is difficult
for people of the low income group to obtain adequate housing,
and it is racial, due to the fact that Negroes are discriminated
against, both as to purchase, rental and occupancy of housing
which measures up to standards in various sections of the
City - restrictive covenants playing their part in that respect?

A (continuing) It is interesting to note that one third of the Chicago, in the southern section thereof is without adequate housing facilities. This is due mainly to the growth of the Negro community in Chicago.

In 1900 the Negro population in Chicago was 30,000 - which has increased to 230,000 persons in 1934.

Between 1930 and 1934, the Negro population increased from some 40,000 to 236,305 in 1934. Negroes were scattered throughout the entire city although there was some concentration in one community just outside the business district. However, with the rapid influx of Negroes from the South after 1900, residential segregation began to develop and the newcomers were more and more crowded into the boundaries of one small area. This community has gradually expanded its boundaries until at the present time Chicago's "Black Belt" extends southward from the Loop, seven and one half miles and contains over two hundred thousand persons.

The Negro has, in addition to the difficulties common to all small wage earners, a special complex of problems which have their roots in the fertile soil of racial discrimination. Belonging to the lowest income group in the United States, the Negro also suffers from various forms of prejudice. In the field of housing this prejudice is expressed through the enforcement of residential segregation. It, in turn, causes the overcrowding of Negroes into the least desirable sections

of a City and allows, through the limitation of supply, excessive exploitation by unscrupulous landlords.

As the number of Negroes in Chicago increased from 30,000 in 1900 to 111,00 in 1920, the most rapid expansion in territory occupied by them took place within a twenty year period.

It is interesting to note that in 1910, 20% of the total Negro population lived in areas in which 95% of the people were white. In 1934, however, only 3% of the total Negro population lived in such districts. In 1910, the area with the highest concentration of Negroes was one in which the Negro population was between 60% and 69% of the total. In 1934, however, 87% of all Negroes lived in areas which were over 70% Negro in population. 69% lived in areas which were between 90% and 99% Negro. Since 1910, it has been increasingly difficult for Negroes to live outside the section of the city created by the agreements of real estate operators and antagonistic community organizations, crystallizing this attitude in restrictive covenants, which effected Negroes in substantial numbers.

In 1940, the Negro community extended from 12th Street, to 71st Street on the south, and from Wentworth Avenue to Cottage Grove Avenue. Within this area, seven and one half miles long, and from one half to a mile and a half wide, lived over 80% or rather lives 80% of Chicago's Negro population. There are conspicuous variations in the character of the neighborhoods in the district. In the northern end are found the blighted

areas, marked by dilapidated buildings, "shoe string" businesses, dim lights, poor streets and dirty alleys. **Adult** Adult and infant mortality rates are high; sickness, crime and juvenile delinquency are prevalent. At the other extreme is the Woodlawn district - from 63rd to 71st Streets, and Cottage Grove Avenue to South Parkway, with a high percentage of home ownership. Now, in this area, the Woodlawn area, there is a high percentage of home ownership, housing facilities equal to any in the City, employment of Negroes in that area steady for the most part, and where no real problem exists as far housing, but in this area, just to the north of it, between 60th and 63rd Streets is an area where restrictive covenants are enforced. As I mentioned, prior to 1920 there had been, as I described, certain owners of homes, and real estate operators got together and effected a covenant to restrict Negroes, and confine them to one particular area, that area I have already described. In 1920, there was some uses of the restrictive covenant. There are sections covering the east side, and south side and west side of the City, which sections have been covered by restrictive covenants.

In this sense, a restrictive covenant is particularly employed, as between certain people, in effect an agreement whereby they will not permit Negroes to live in certain areas; not only not live, but will not sell or lease certain properties to Negroes in a particular area.

A point before that, at first the residents of neighboring white communities segregated Negroes by resort to terror and by agreement of real estate operators. But in 1918-1919, and 1920, this more effect mechanism was discovered, namely the restrictive covenant. The covenants are agreements, enforceable by courts, between a certain percentage of property owners within an area not to rent or sell their property to Negroes. These agreements have been upheld in Illinois state courts, but in a recent appeal to the United States Supreme Court have been set aside as to this particular Woodlawn area, the decisions of the lower courts, the State courts being reversed.

Restrictive covenants are based ostensibly on the questionable belief that Negro occupancy causes property values to depreciate. Their real purpose, however, is to enforce residential segregation and to prevent Negroes from having free access to certain public facilities such as schools, parks and beaches outside the segregated area.

The Negro does not depreciate property values, as such, but the absentee landlord who gets all out of a building possible, and puts very little back into the up keep of the building is as much responsible for the depreciation of the building as any other factor.

High rentals, low income and shortage of housing facilities with consequent, overcrowding and doubling-up of families, have inevitably resulted in rapid property deterioration and

the creation of health and social problems.

The degree of overcrowding may be estimated by comparing the population density of the area with that of adjacent white communities. The most densely populated section of the Negro community is between 47th and 51st Streets, at the center of the Black Belt. Here the population density is approximately seventy thousand per square mile, in an area which is characterized by four and five story apartments. With the exception of a section between 22nd and 31st Streets and of another between 63rd and 67th, the density of population is greater in the Negro than in corresponding white communities. This is especially true of the blocks between 39th and 55th Streets, east of South Parkway.

In the white areas between these streets the density of population is approximately 34,000 and 37,000 per square miles, while in the corresponding Negro areas it is respectively 53,000 and 70,000.

One of the most frequent accusations made against the Negro, as I pointed out, is that he destroys property. There is no doubt that property in the Negro area has deteriorated. However, it must be remembered that a number of racial groups have previously passed through this area and that the Negro inherited it only after most of the life of its buildings was spent. Nearly all of the structures in the community are 20 to 30 years of age and of relatively poor construction. In

addition, few repairs or improvements are made by absentee landlords, who know that their property will be rented, regardless of its condition. Over-use of the buildings, caused by the doubling-up of families, and the refusal of absentee landlords to repair or maintain them are to be blamed for the extraordinary deterioration of property.

SEN. WALLACE: We understand them, from your statement, that you consider the absentee landlord responsible for this condition in that he takes advantage of the shortage of houses to raise rent ?

A I would say so definitely. In the first place, you will find two and three families occupying space where one family ordinarily should occupy. Yes, that is the particular type or method real estate operators enforce in the Negro community, they take the attitude that the Negro must live some place, and will pay the rent, and how the rent is paid, or how many families occupy the apartment or flat, is not considered - therefore, rather than amortize their investment, through efficient operation, they simply refuse to make necessary repairs, other than those they are compelled to make, that is their attitude rather than trying to amortize the investment over a period of say, ten (10) years.

SEN. WALLACE: What proportion would you say, if you have that information, of landlords in that particularly over-crowded area are absentee residents ?

A I would say between 90% and maybe 92% or 93% are absentee landlords. I have the figure here that only from five to ten percent of the buildings in this area I have described are owned by occupants.

Q Did I understand you to say that since so much demolition has been going on in the Negro section, has any effort been made to rebuild houses, which have been removed by demolition ?

A I was coming to that - since houses were demolished, practically fell down, there has been practically no building in that community to any extent since 1928. A number of houses have been demolished, and a number more should be demolished, but no program was started; nor had been started since 1928 to replace these dwellings.

Take for example an area between - well from 18th to 21st Street and from State Street west for three (3) blocks, just entire blocks in there have been torn down, and left vacant. That area was inhabited by Negroes once, but left vacant and has been vacant for a period of years, being held for speculative purposes, I would say.

Now the kitchennette apartments have sprung up to meet the needs of this overcrowded area and to profit unscrupulous landlords. Kitchenettes are one room apartments. A large seven room apartment may be cut up into as many separate apartments for seven different families all of whom use the same bath and toilet facilities.

A gas burned for cooking purposes is generally installed in the closet of each room. The demand for space in the Negro community has made the kitchennette a gold mine for all kinds of owners.

SEN. WALLACE: Any questions ?

REP. GREENE: Mr. Cayton ?

A Yes.

Q Have you made a study, as to the matter of investment in this property and the amount of money from such investment taken into the property by landlords - absentee or otherwise ?

A I am sorry, Mr. Greene, I have not.

Q Have you an opinion as to the depreciation of property caused from colored occupancy as against white occupancy ?

A Yes, very definite.

Q What is that opinion, please ? A If you will take a piece of property built to accommodate a family of three, for example and put three and four times that many in that same apartment, with different arrangement, the wear and tear on the facilities will tend to depreciate the value of the property considerably. We will say that nine (9) people use facilities, originally intended for three (3), and you will have two and three times the wear .

Q Yes. A Now, we can take another example, a well we will say a room built to accommodate one person, built for one person to occupy, and put in two (2) persons, in a years

time, you will have two years wear, and then multiply that condition, and you will get the answer.

Now this brings in that menace I spoke of "kitchenettes" - which are a menace to health and to morale. In most instances they violate all the provisions of health, safety, and building codes.

REP. GREENE: Mr. Cayton, have you an opinion as to the delinquency of the Negro youth, in relation to inadequate housing facilities ?

A Yes, general social disorganization. It may not be possible to state definitely that poor housing is a direct cause of juvenile delinquency - however, it is important to note that juvenile delinquency is increased in districts where there is the most overcrowding. Particularly is this true in the area of kitchenette apartments.

Q So, you would say very definitely that a great deal of our juvenile delinquency is caused by this overcrowded housing condition ? A Yes.

.Q I see. A I have a case right here, the report of a Cook County woman probation officer on the cases of one hundred Negro girl delinquents, tells the store of the high incidence of sex offenses in one-room apartments. In 72% of these cases, a kitchenette was the scene of the delinquent act. Although the other girls did not live in kitchenettes, they habitually visited them.

A (continuing) I might say too, that there also seems to be a definite correlation between the frequency of illegitimate births and overcrowding and lack of recreation facilities, as a result of this inadequate housing in Negro sections.

REP. GREENE: It has been stated that in the Negro section where most of the Negroes reside, that gambling and vice tend to depreciate property.

A Yes.

Q Have you made a study of that, the effect it might have in the depreciation of property ?

A No, but I would say it was just like juvenile delinquency, as far as that is concerned. Landlords almost welcome this sort of thing, because they can charge high rentals, and get them.

I would answer that question further by saying that the presence of gambling and vice generally deteriorates property and property values and tend to break down the morale in the community, and that condition will continue as long as this type of establishment is permitted to be there. And, under the present system, they will continue to be there, as those that control them are able to pay two and three times more rent than a legitimate tenant would be able to pay. When a gambling establishment pays three and four times the rent a smaller business is able to pay, that establishment will continue to be present, despite the fact that such establish-

ments tend to demoralize the community, and again I would consider the second vicious practice of the absentee landlord again, who wants to cash in on the property any way that he can, get all he can out of it, and don't want to lose any opportunity to do so.

Q Now, Mr. Cayton, it has been stated by F. H. A., those in authority, that they would not lend any money out in a Negro section, because of instances wherein a family might want to invest ten thousand (\$10,000.00) dollars, and next door to this investment someone might open a policy station. In your opinion, is that true ?

A Yes.

Q Have you made a study of F. H. A. loans in Negro neighborhoods ?

A No, I have not, but I am aware of the attitude of F.H.A.

Q And what is that attitude, relative to loans on Negro property, or to Negroes to build in Negro communities ?

A I would not want to make a definite statement on that - but as you said - it is not their practice simply on account of gambling and vice. I think that is true - although there is some discrepancy there. But, it is true, nevertheless, that the existence of such conditions might generally reflect on the value of a ten thousand dollar investment.

Q The reason I asked that question is, that the absentee landlord doesn't care who he rents the property to, so long

as income comes in.

A That is right.

Q And since one family desires to occupy a site which they own, erect a home, maintain a good home, and with the intention of keeping it up, the absentee landlord who might own a piece of property next door would serve to hinder the desire of this particular family I have mentioned ?

A Yes.

Q I thought you might have a particular instance in mind where such was the case, relative to F.H.A. loans in Negro neighborhoods ?

A No, I have not, but I have that general information, not much incentive to lend money under those conditions. I want to go into that situation though. Especially I am interested in the occupancy of property by these absentee landlords who take all the profits out of the building, and make no effort to keep it in salable condition, do nothing to enhance the value of it.

Q Have you made a study of the increase in rents since there has been such an increase in Negro tenants in that section ?

A No, I have not, I am sorry I have these figures which might be of interest to you along that line:

"In 1912, a University of Chicago study revealed that while Bohemians and Poles were paying \$8.50 per week for apartments, steel mill employees \$9.50, Jews in the Ghetto \$10.50, that

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Negroes, in the midst of dilapidation and crowded into the territory adjoining the segregated vice-district, were paying \$12.00 to \$12.50. In 1925, a study made by the Department of Public Welfare showed that native whites paid \$20.00 to \$25.00 per month for unheated flats, foreign born whites \$15.00 to \$20.00, and Negroes \$25.00 to \$30.00. For heated apartments the median rental for white families was \$55.00 to \$60.00, but for Negro families, it was \$65.00 to \$70.00 per month."

In the intervening years, rent charges in the Negro area have skyrocketed. The differential in rentals can be seen by comparing the rates in adjacent Negro and white communities.

REP. GREENE: That is all.

MR. FOSTER: One question ? A Yes ?

Q Mr Caytn, can you give us an estimate of the amount of property which is at present in Chicago under restrictive covenants ?

A No, I cannot, Mr. Foster. I tried to do that some three years ago, we attempted to work that out. I understand that the Chicago Housing Authority made a study of that, which was made during the construction period of the Ida B. Wells homes, and sent that information to Washington. Sent to Washington one of these pamphlets, covering the restricted covenant areas. I have never been able to get a hold of this, and I want to advise the Commission to contact the Chicago Housing Authority and the United States Housing Authority, and get a

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hold of that report, or a copy of it. I have contacted Mr. Robert R. Taylor.

But, however, we estimate that 80% of the property in Chicago is covered by restrictive covenants.

Q Mr. Cayton, I was wondering whether or not you have made a study of the "Slum Clearance Bill" ?

A No.

Q So then, you have no opinion there as to whether or not that will help the situation as far as Negro housing is concerned, or rather it will work a definite hardship ?

A No, I have no opinion on that, if you will permit me to answer that question, the way it is asked, I would say that it is true, that a hardship will be worked upon the Negro generally. True enough that this new bill will eliminate some of the bad features I have spoken of, in the Public Service Corporation Bill; but I feel that the Negro will not be greatly benefitted by the "Slum Clearance Bill", Mr. Foster.

REP. GREENE: Mr Cayton, in the light of your statement this morning, have you any suggestion that we might make to the Legislature, or recommendations we might make to the Legislature that might tend to help the housing situation in Chicago ?

A Well, emphatically, I think that some legislation should be made or enforced which would do away with restrictive covenants, some law should be enacted by the Legislature in

that regard. I don't like to suggest just what should be recommended, because I am not in position to make such a recommendation - but I do think something along that line should be done; also about this rehabilitation program, I think should be investigated very thoroughly by some private group. I think all of the factors I have discussed, briefly, should be investigated very thoroughly, relative to this rehabilitation program which is discussed so generally now, I think that should be gone into very carefully and given all sort of consideration; also I think it might be wise to investigate the policy of the F. H. A., as a Government agency might be very thoroughly investigated. As I view the situation as being dangerous, I think it should be well considered.

Q Thank you.

MR. HENDERSON: Mr. Cayton ? A Yes ?

Q You are familiar with the duties of the Building Bureau, the City Codes, with respect to Buildings ?

A Yes ,

Q Will you make a statement, if you can, as to whether or not there is adequate inspection of buildings in Negro communities ?

A Absolutely not. No inspection by any of the departments. I generally find that there is not any, whether it is due to lack of staff or not, I don't know just what the situation is

but I do know that there is no inspection by City authorities. I know this is true in the Negro section, otherwise some of the things would not exist.

I might state in that regard - that the Board of Health may declare that kitchennette buildings are lodging houses. Lodging houses are required to have but one water closet for 25 men, and but one for 23 women. A tenant's complaint of lack of toilet facilities may be rejected by the Board of Health because the building is classified as a lodging house, and fulfills the requirements of the Board of Health. In most instances, the various city agencies have either ignored such complaints or found it impossible, because of their limited staffs, to enforce the codes, therefore we have practically no inspection in the Negro section of the City by City agencies. People move into vacant property which has been condemned, and no attempt made to enforce the building and health codes of the City.

Q Why is that, may I ask, I would like to ask ?

A I don't know. The reason I think hinges on the economic side. Some time when some of the public officials acted - a protest was made. The conditions reported were as I have set out, lack of room, air and light, one place no water, and another in regard to families living in one apartment, six (6) families living in an attic with an open room, no facilities - all in defiance of every regulation, violating laws of health,

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and every other moral law; protests made by organizations, public bodies, groups, nothing was done - why? - I don't know. An inspector came out and saw the conditions and said that he didn't want to enforce the law, altho there were flagrant violations of the law, because people had to live some place. Whether or not that was official is questionable, but I know the law is not enforced out there in that regard

MR. FOSTER: And if we didn't have restrictive covenants, conditions would expand normally ?

A Yes.

Q So a person living in the section, seeking a house, trying to find out, find adequate housing and cannot do so, then you would say, taking into consideration the restrictive covenants, that this condition is due and created by the lack of enforcement of these laws ?

A Absolutely.

MR. HAREWOOD: About the buildings where the conditions you speak of exist in the so-called slum area is principally populated by Negroes ?

A Yes.

Q But you do admit that if these restraints as to health and so forth and sanitation were enforced, it would cause an unusual situation in the Negro community, by Negroes not being able to find other places in which to live ?

A I think so, yes.

Q Well then, you do apply some reason for this ?

A I am more than applying reason, I understand it, but I don't agree with it.

Q Well, have you any solution for this ?

A Yes, I think so. It seems to me that what you have said is very true, but should not be true. The reason that lies behind this - or behind that statement should not maintain strictly in a Negro community and that this condition would not exist in this particular Negro community, as to health and sanitation if the laws were enforced, which in turn would work a hardship on the Negro.

Q I see.

MR. HENDERSON: I see you made mention of some foreign districts, neighborhoods - with respect to them, and the enforcement of the laws regarding buildings, health and sanitation, say Maxwell District, and the other districts you mentioned - just west maybe.

A Yes.

Q Would the same conditions as to sanitation in such a district and some other districts on the North side, would the same condition apply where white people live ?

A I would say to that, as I said to Attorney Harewood, in the first place I think there is a disinclination on the part of many City Bureaus to make and enforce the requirements, especially in the Negro section.

MR. HAREWOOD: You feel that the various City departments use discrimination as far as enforcement of laws in Negro sections ?

A I think so, to an extent.

Q Have you made a study relative to the "slum districts."

A No, I have not, but I think that you will find a similar condition in every community to some extent, but more prevalent in the Negro districts, that is to say, violations are more flagrant, and go un-noticed. For example, if an Italian in that section has a job and has money to pay for a little better house, he might move out of his present surroundings into another community.

Q I am asking you as to the condition in that district, if there is an difference as to the lack of enforcement in those districts and lack of enforcement in districts populated by Negroes ?

A I think the City Bureaus definitely neglect Negro neighborhoods more so than they do a similar situation in a white community, yes.

Q And you have studied this community ?

A I have.

Q That is all.

MR. SIMPSON: (interrupting) I want to ask a question.

(confusion)

SEN. WALLACE: If you have a question, report it to the

counsel.

MR. SIMPSON: I want to say this

SEN. WALLACE: We can't have any discussion from the floor -
you may talk with Mr. Harewood.

MR. SIMPSON: You must hear it. I am

SEN WALLACE: (interrupting) You cannot ask any questions
from the floor.

MR. SIMPSON: He said that on the south side

SEN. WALLACE: I have to rule you out of order. . . .

MR. SIMPSON: (interrupting) I am in order. I am asking
the privelege to ask a question for the benefit of

SEN. WALLACE: Mr. Harewood will wait on you.

(Whereupon Attorney Richard A. Harewood goes to the seat
of Mr Simpson conferring with him - out of hearing of
the Commission)

SEN. WALLACE: Mr Cayton, we thank you for your information,
and we will excuse you.

(witness excused)

MR. HENDERSON: May I read two or three paragraphs, for the
benefit of the record, I have a copy of a restrictive covenant,
presumably one which has been enforced in the area generally
known as Washington Park, which states:

(reading)