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A study of an Urban League project designed to integrate Negro workers in Boston's retail store industry

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

A STUDY OF AN URBAN LEAGUE PROJECT
DESIGNED TO INTEGRATE NEGRO WORKERS
IN BOSTON'S RETAIL STORE INDUSTRY

A Thesis

Submitted by

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1950

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The past few years have produced a rather exceptional interest in the minority person and his problems. Since there are many conceptions of what constitutes a minority person, it is necessary to point out that a minority group varies from time to time in any given culture, and that there are frequent changes in minority-majority status within particular cultures. The essential difference between the minority and the majority group may best be understood in terms of the degree of social participation enjoyed by each. Lack of ability to participate in the various phases of society has many disadvantages to the restricted group or person. The minority individual, walled up by the effects of discrimination, can easily turn personal frustration into socially unacceptable behavior.

This fact may, in part, explain the unusual concentration upon this problem in recent years. The American Council on Race Relations listed a total of 1134 national, regional, state, international and territorial agencies engaging in intergroup relations in 1948-1949. Relatively few of the agencies listed have an extensive historical past, and in the main, they are recent in origin.

Significant, also, has been the recent and growing interest in the subject on the part of social workers. Actually, this interest has been very late in coming, but now its ramifications are leading to the awareness of many social workers of the new avenues of thought stimulated by

1 Directory of Agencies in Intergroup Relations, American Council on Race Relations, 1948-1949, p.ii.

the intercultural factor in social work practice and philosophy. Recent² professional literature is gradually reflecting this trend. This new interest would seem to be a healthy one as the problems of all peoples are involved in any broad concept of social work.

This thesis is presented with the hope that new insight may be brought to light regarding this interest.

Purpose and General Questions

The purpose of this study is to analyze a community organization project carried out by the Industrial Relations Department of the Urban League of Greater Boston, Inc., over a five year period. The project's aim was that of obtaining higher job classifications for Negro workers in the Greater Boston community in the retail sales field. Although the project is not complete, the five year period may be considered adequate time in which to test certain factors of validity of the operation.

The following questions appear as being of special interest to the study:

1. How, with whom, at what points, and in what situations were community organization methods employed in this project?
2. To what extent did the application of such methods contribute to a solution of a community problem?
3. How, and in what manner, does the project indicate the possible use of social work skills in a community situation not directly

2 For examples of this interest, see: John Caswell Smith, Jr., "Understanding the Negro Client", The Family, May, 1946; Luna Bowdoin Brown, "Race as a Factor in Establishing a Case-work Relationship", Social Casework, pp.91-97, March, 1950; and, New Emphasis on Cultural Factors, Journal of Social Casework, Reprints, 1946-8.

within the field of formal social work practice?

Scope and Method of Procedure

In the development of the study, the existence of a community organization problem, attempts to solve the problem by means of social work methods, and the results of the process will be described.

The main source of data of the study consists of an original survey made in 1944 and a re-survey made in 1950, both having been completed by the author. These consisted of a study of the racial employment patterns of ten retail stores in downtown Boston's shopping district. The ten stores were chosen for their representativeness. For the purpose of checking the survey against other shopping centers in the metropolitan area, ten other stores were surveyed but not included in the data.

Additional data was obtained from the agency's records and from the working experience of the author in this same agency. Useful material for the study was obtained from employers, community leaders and trade union representatives.

In the development of the study, step by step procedures will be outlined.

Definitions

Certain semantic difficulties occur in a thesis of this type. The field of race relations carries with it all of the problems of reaching clear meanings which are characteristic of the field of social work. In addition, we find new feelings and theories entering the race relations picture. However, for the purposes of this study the following definitions are submitted:

The word minority or minority group will be used to designate the

Negro as a group significantly limited in our culture.

The word majority designates any group which is not so limited.

The word Negro or colored person is used interchangeably to denote any persons commonly thought of as being Negroes. Anthropological considerations will be neglected in favor of designations commonly ascribed to denote the Negro in American culture.

The word integration will be used in a specific sense to denote a process, in any stage of its development, by which the limitations of the minority person or group become lessened. It is also the process by which the range of opportunity of the minority person or group becomes enlarged, enhanced and developed in such a way that it may be observed as a change from minority status.

The term retail store industry is used to denote what is commonly called the department store industry, and includes both department stores and specialty shops.

Limitations

The social scene with regard to the problem of minority needs is a rapidly changing development. Modern progress is effecting changes in the historical status of the Negro. The extent to which such progress is lasting, however, is not always evident. Such changes give rise to considerable subjectivity in the thinking of people about the subject.

The factor of subjectivity, therefore, was evident at several points. Employers, minority group members, community good will groups, and leaders of the various groups involved entertained various deeply rooted opinions and attitudes which conditioned their approach to the situation.

Despite the discipline of social work skills, it is often difficult to control or accurately describe the interaction of such elements of subjectivity in a community organization project. For this reason the study is not intended to be definitive.

CHAPTER II

THE URBAN LEAGUE: ITS HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY

History

The Urban League is one of the oldest race relations agencies in the United States. Out of several organizations which constituted the "Committee on Urban Conditions Among Negroes" in 1910, came the "National Urban League on Urban Conditions Among Negroes."

The post-reconstruction period became an era of great change in the status of the American Negro. The increased mechanization of southern industry, the lowered economic status of the southern economy, and the difficulties involved in the struggle for jobs, made the life of the southern Negro a precarious one. In the early part of the 20th century migration began.

From the southern areas, thousands of Negroes began moving to the large urban centers of the North, East and West, slowly at first, and later on at an exceptional rate at the time of World War I. In describing some of the factors in this process by which Negroes became a mobile people in order to better their economic and social conditions, and were enabled to move by means of the overtures of northern and western industry, Robert C. Weaver writes:

Once begun, the movement northward continued at an increased rate until, in 1930, 20 per cent of the total Negro population of the

Nation was living North of the Mason-Dixon line. Since 1930, the migration of Negroes has continued. It has, as was true during the decade 1920-1930, not only involved movement from the South to the North and West, but from the deep South to the upper South and from the rural to the urban South. The net result of these movements has been a rapid urbanization of Negroes- most pronounced in the North and quite apparent in the South. 1

The Urban League undertook the responsibility of assisting in the process of integration of this minority into the life of the larger community. Its task became one of helping Negroes to adjust to their new environment by acquainting them with the resources of the urban centers, and of helping the total community to know and understand some of the problems of the new neighbors, for whom few facilities were available.

The Urban League, from this origin, grew to reach its present strength of about sixty local agencies throughout the United States, with a national office in New York City. Living in cities covered by Urban League affiliates are 3,000,000 Negroes, representing 45 per cent of the total Negro population of America.²

The program of the Urban League has been adapted to the pressing need of the Negro group at any one period. As a result of changes taking place in the process of integration, new areas of interest have received the concentration of League personnel. Preston Vallen illustrates this well as he writes:

Increasingly, as existing social work agencies include Negroes in their general programs, the League has been relieved to a great extent of necessity for carrying specific social work programs, and has tended to emphasize special projects in industrial and

1 Robert C. Weaver, "Economic Factors in Negro Migration- Past and Future", Social Forces, Vol. 18, No. 1, 1939, p. 90.

2 Preston Vallen, "Racial Programs in Social Work", Social Work Yearbook, 1949, p. 416.

community relations.

The Urban League of Greater Boston, Inc., came into being in the year 1919. Problems of that time were viewed by the League as being:

1. Disproportionate work opportunities.
2. Lack of vacation facilities for underprivileged children.
3. Wretched housing.
4. A devastating tuberculosis rate.
5. Inadequate nursery school accommodations for the children of working mothers.
6. No Negro social workers with a city-wide organization.
7. Complete exclusion of Negro workers from the Public Utilities.
8. No work opportunities in chain stores largely patronized by Negroes.
9. Inadequate boys' program in the district.
10. Exclusion from labor unions. 4

It may be noted that of the ten items listed, five have to do with the factor of employment. Traditionally viewed as the primary problem of the Negro in the United States, economic limitations were also present in the Boston area. Mr. Matthew W. Bullock, first Executive Secretary of the League, wrote in 1920:

Though Negroes have been living in and around Boston since 1638, there is probably no large city in the country where they find it so difficult to secure employment that will pay a living wage. 5

The Urban League in Boston has grown to an agency of three professional and two clerical workers, and occasionally helps in the training of social work students. Its board and staff are inter-racial. The professional workers have the following roles: administration (Executive Secretary), health and welfare (Community Relations Secretary), and industrial relations (Industrial Relations Secretary). The present estimated population of the Negro group in Boston is set at 27,000,

3 Ibid., p. 416.

4 Boston Urban League, Inc., (former name) Twentieth Anniversary Report, 1939, p. 2.

5 Ibid., p. 1.

one of the smallest percentages of Negroes to the general population of any metropolitan center in the nation. In spite of this fact, the local League, concentrating upon the problems of the health, education, recreation, industrial, and general welfare needs of the Negro in relation to the whole community, has a large task to perform in the social work field.

Philosophy

Certain factors in the current scene make an explanation of the philosophy of the Urban League as essential as is the clear definition of terms. The sharpening of issues of conflict between the Western democracies and communism has definitely involved the Urban League. The issue of different races and religious groups striving for mutual harmony in a geographically telescoped world has led to a far-flung search for practical solutions to conflict situations. Race and cultural minorities, especially, have become a barometer by which the sincere intentions of nations and political systems are tested.

The social work process is a process of change. In adjusting the person to his environment by means of the "help" of the social case work skills, the worker is actually producing a change, and if the outcome is satisfying to the client, that change is observable in some manner. The same is true of group work.

In the process of community organization in the field of intercultural relations, the change in status is often the basis for considerable hostility. It is logically impossible to remove the limitations of a group without stirring up feelings of resistance to the changes of status and their effects. Submerged, and sometimes

unconscious feelings of hostility can smoulder for a long period only to break out into the open when new and changed roles are presented. The Urban League, unavoidably, must deal with heated emotions, set ways, and hostility to change; and contrariwise, it must also deal with those groups intent upon rapid change without sound regard for the means employed to reach improved ends.

Basic to Urban League philosophy is the democratic ideal. Underlying the development of the Urban League is the viewpoint that the limitations of the colored minority can be successfully removed within the framework of a democratic society. Thus it is that inconsistencies are looked upon, not as insurmountable conditions of our way of life, but as barriers to the fuller conception of democracy which can be removed by democratic processes. This belief in the democratic impetus of social work is well stated by Louis Wirth, who writes:

The function of social work has always been the enhancement and equalization of opportunity and the integration of all people into a common society and a common humanity. 6

The Urban League is interested in the total community and is convinced that its objectives for the American Negro are in complete and consistent agreement with the goals of democratic social work.

The belief of the Urban League movement is that there is a strong relationship between ends and means. Thus, the tools of social work take on a special meaning to this agency, for they become not only methods to be used to solve specific problems, but also indices of the future and what it holds for people.

6 Louis Wirth, "Social Goals for America", The Social Welfare Forum, National Conference of Social Work, 1950, p. 19.

Urban League operation in Atlanta, Georgia, in San Francisco, California, or in Boston, Massachusetts, differs in approach. Local conditions create the need for varying types of approach, attuned to these factors of difference. At the same time, basic elements are constant and the philosophy is constant. Certain fundamental methods are repeatedly used in certain aspects of the work. Among these are research, evaluation, planning, and interpretation.

To bring out the method of operation of the Urban League in differing locales, we might take an actual example from the Urban League files. A few years ago, the Urban League in Atlanta found that it could not use the term "Industrial Relations Secretary" to designate a professional worker carrying this responsibility in this southern community. The term "Vocational Guidance Secretary" had to be substituted in order to carry out the same work. There was considerable feeling on the part of white Georgians against the idea of Negroes participating in industrial relations, whereas the idea of vocational guidance implied that the program was one of helping Negroes to obtain training and skills. The fact that the community refused to accept the existence of trained and skilled Negroes necessitated this change in name, but not a change in function on the part of this League. Many similar examples could be found in the experience of the Urban League, especially where the strong segregational patterns of the South have indicated such minor compromises.

Gunnar Myrdal illustrates both the scope and the limitations of the Urban League's operations as he writes:

The activity of the local Urban Leagues is as wide in scope as

modern social work when applied to the variegated needs of the poverty-stricken Negro communities. The outside observer cannot help but be impressed, not only by the urge to keep abreast of the latest developments in the broader social work field, but also with the attempts to find new solutions for the specialized problems of the Negro ghetto. It is apparent, however, that, particularly in the South, the Leagues work under tremendous handicaps on account of indifference and even hostility from most white people and half-heartedness on the part of even white sponsors and friends. It is also apparent that, all over the country, the efficiency of the work is kept down by inadequate financial resources. 7

Thus it is that, in spite of the Urban League's interracial character, from its earliest start there have existed serious limitations to the fullest conception of its role and importance, even among some of its friends. We could amplify Mr. Myrdal's statements to include the fact that even in the North the same handicaps of which he writes occupy a strong position in restricting the League's force.

7 Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma, Vol. II, 1944, p. 838.

CHAPTER III

THE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS DEPARTMENT OF THE URBAN LEAGUE OF GREATER BOSTON

The employment problem of the Negro is undoubtedly of primary importance to the total problem of his status in our culture. It is for this reason that the strongest emphasis of the League has traditionally been placed upon the matter of jobs for Negroes. Myrdal refers to this point when he states:

None of the local Leagues can afford to become active in all these fields, but a primary task of all Leagues is to find jobs, more jobs, and better jobs for Negroes. They all function as employment agencies. The attempt is to run these agencies in an active way, opening up new jobs and preventing loss of jobs already held by Negroes. They have to get into contact with employers and trade union officers and try to "sell" Negro labor-- impressing upon the employers that Negro labor is efficient and satisfactory, and upon the unionists that the Negro is a good and faithful fellow worker. A careful check-up has to be made on references, and a reputation must be gained and defended for the type of labor offered. The possibilities of vocational training have to be kept open to Negro youth, and the youths themselves have to be encouraged to be ambitious. The civil service boards have to be watched so that they do not discriminate against Negroes, and Negroes must be encouraged to take civil service examinations. ¹

This is a fairly accurate description of Urban League operations in the industrial field. Since 1944, the date of Myrdal's publication, certain factors have entered the picture which have somewhat changed the viewpoint he presents in at least a superficial, and perhaps a permanent way. Simply stated, it is far easier, at this stage of writing, to "sell" Negro labor. Employers have had experience with Negro labor. Trade union officers have seen the Negro worker participate in the trade union movement. Recent trends have changed an "experiment"

¹ Ibid. p. 839.

into an experience. In addition to the mounting mass of experience with Negro labor, there is a tendency for recent surveys of the social service facilities of American communities to reduce duplications and look for economies in the social welfare field. The Urban League, in the midst of these trends, seeks to transfer as many responsibilities to proper agencies as soon, and as speedily, as the agencies in question are ready to undertake obligations which clearly belong to them. Practically speaking, this means that the League may be engaged in a specific project with various goals. Involved in the process is the implication that there will be a transfer of responsibility to the proper agency, and that the only reason for Urban League operation is the lack of acceptance of this obligation. If the process demonstrates the obligation, regardless of the other goals, the success is thereby established.

The industrial relations aspect of Urban League operations has assumed a strong position in the eyes of the community. The Urban League has been thought of as the place to go "to get jobs" on the part of the minority person. In working with employers, labor union representatives, and other agency representatives, however, the Urban League has been more interested in the employment patterns of the community than it has been in servicing individual Negroes in their search for jobs. The thinking behind this point is that if the barriers to employment, as regards discrimination, are removed, the Urban League has made a useful contribution of far more significance than it would in operating an "employment agency for Negroes". By setting the stage for the job-placing of individual Negroes, the Urban League continues the discriminatory pattern of segregated facilities. But by opening up new avenues of employment for

qualified Negroes, and by assisting in the training of Negroes for specific skills, the Urban League is making a higher contribution.

With this exception, the statements of Myrdal are fairly accurate as to Urban League operations in the industrial sphere. The task, to a large extent, remains one of "selling" Negro labor, but there are various ways of selling a product. The Urban League product, until World War II, was sold in terms of what ought to be done; now it can be sold in terms of what has been done, in terms of the use of Negro man-power on its own merits, not because of altruistic motivations on the part of benevolent employers or progressive trade union leaders.

The objectives of the Urban League's industrial program are:

1. To open up discriminatory barriers to the employment of Negro workers, by pointing out the short-sighted view of management in setting up barriers which are adversely affecting their businesses in the important area of losses in skill.

2. To show labor unions that a policy of exclusion of minority workers constitutes a body of potential anti-labor workers of exceptional detriment to their goals, as opposed to the unity of working people.

3. To show fellow-workers of the potential Negro worker that the colored worker is an ally, not a foe, of decent working conditions, and that the employer who uses race as a tool for maintaining status quo relationships does it for reasons which are not in the interests of any worker.

4. To raise the level of evaluation of the average person toward the Negro worker to that extent where the Negro worker is looked upon as a worker, not as a Negro worker, or in other words, to reduce the

importance of inconsequential material in the average man's conception of the worker.

5. To coordinate the feelings of the minority community in such a way that race may not be used as an excuse for lack of skills; that discrimination may not be used as the basis for the defeat of the individual personality, and that jobs may be attained by skill and ability.

6. To provide the Negro community, and agency clients, with information as to trends in the employment picture; and to assist them in finding resources with which to become adequately trained for new openings.

7. To interpret facts in the industrial scene in an accurate manner, so that changes may become recognized and dealt with by individuals and groups in the community.

Throughout the years the Urban League has used the above objectives in a number of different situations. Simple as they are, their application to the industrial scene in specific cases has taken considerable time before practical results were observable. In the project about which the thesis is written the extent of time spent may accurately be listed at 31 years, the duration of Urban League existence in the Boston community. In other less stubborn cases the results were more rapid in coming. The proper synchronization of events with program, however, frequently leads to happy consequences, and in the period of the last 5 years this particular project moved rapidly.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Definite conditions in the year 1944 made possible the project which had attracted the attention of the Urban League for many years. Interesting developments had already taken place in the economic life of the whole community, including the Negro group. War manpower demands had become exceptionally acute, and Negroes had already demonstrated their usefulness as a labor source. As a matter of fact, company after company for the first time broke down racially restricted hiring policies, some, perhaps, under the impetus of the "cost-plus" basis of production, through which every worker employed became an asset to the company in terms of profits. There were other forces which operated in favor of the Negro group. Under his wartime executive powers, President Roosevelt had issued Executive Order 8802, which outlawed discrimination in employment in war industries. This opened the way for countless minority persons to take their places beside majority workers on the production lines of the nation's industry. In addition, organized labor, especially the Congress of Industrial Organizations, went all out in opposing racial discrimination in employment.

This combination of acute manpower needs and improved relationships on the part of organized labor led to many gains for the colored minority. Here, for the first time, was the possibility of the actual demonstration of abilities, and the Negro worker performed well.

Defining a Problem Area

A cursory examination of the Negro press is enough to give the majority person a conception of sources of irritation to the Negro

community. The retail sales field has, for a long period, been a source of such irritation. In cities where Negroes constitute a large group in a specific area, the battle for jobs has become an aggressive fight on the part of militantly minded leaders of the Negro group. In St. Louis, in New York, and in various other American cities, Negroes have used their buying power as a tool to fight economic discrimination. It has been an effective tool, as Negroes applied the formula, in racially segregated sections, "Don't buy where you can't work." In sections where the buying power was sufficient, white store owners have been forced to hire Negro help. The fact that Negroes constituted the bulk of their patronage meant that there were few who could withstand the pressure of hostile public opinion and still maintain sound business status.

In Boston, in 1944, this force of hostility was a real indication of the inconsistencies of our democratic society. It was discussed in the press, verbalized in informal groups, and referred to in organized groups. The issue of the war, which called upon the support of every group in terms of democratic objectives, seemed sharpened by a glowing inconsistency on the home front. It was only logical that Negroes, with money to spend as a result of new incomes from war work, should be struck by the glaring fact that wherever they traded they could notice the absence of colored employees. Further, it seemed quite unnatural to ask war service, and welcome war work from Negroes, and, at the same time, to relegate them to menial tasks in other areas.

In this period, the Urban League built up a considerable amount of information regarding the hostile feeling on the part of Negroes. Following its own fact-finding in this area, the Urban League felt that some-

thing could be done about this tension situation, and that the time was ripe for action of a sort which had not been possible over the many years of its interest in the problem. Certain assets, in terms of the factors above, appeared to make the time more conducive to change than ever before. The procedure became one of admitting that the time seemed ripe for action by Negro groups, and for encouraging white groups to act also. But toward both groups, the Urban League pursued a policy of maintaining objectivity so far as possible, and of constantly redefining the need for research and planning as primary steps to any action.

It must be pointed out that, in addition to the information coming to the agency from various groups in the Negro community, the League had another source of information in the clients coming to the agency. The local League, for the past few years, has seen about one thousand direct clients, by appointment, each year. They are mainly Negro, they think of the Urban League as "their" agency, and most of them think of the League as a place to "get jobs". Frequently, after talking with a worker, the problem is seen by the client as being some other, and not an employment problem. Sometimes it is a problem of civil rights, and the case is referred to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People for action by their legal staff. There are also many other referrals to private and public social agencies, as well as referrals to possible resources for employment.

This group, as a result of individual interviews, reflected many of the problems of the year 1944, and the greatest single one, from the employment point of view, was that of "under-employment", or the loss of educational and training skills by working at jobs beneath the level

of skill of the individual. Under-employment, of course, became a matter of great interest to the Urban League and as a result, catalogues of skill were accumulated. For example, in the year 1944, the Urban League knew of at least six well qualified Negroes whose skill and training as physicians made them proper persons for manning the staff positions of local hospitals. A much larger number of variously trained personnel were known by the Urban League to be unable to take their places in accordance with their skills because of current discriminatory practices. These persons included people of skills varying from service occupations to the highest professional job classifications listed in the Department of Labor's "Dictionary of Occupational Titles". The leveling force was seen to be the factor of discrimination which placed the Negro, skilled or unskilled, in a low position in the job market.

It was noted by the Urban League from its contacts with employers that industry's manpower needs were very acute during this period. Nonetheless, Negroes were not being hired, not, that is, in any of the more desirable positions. At the same time, defeatism, in the thinking of the minority person, was seen as constituting as much of a threat as was the discriminatory situation itself. The Urban League recognized the problem, stood ready to help those willing to do something about it, and offered cooperation to both white and colored groups toward this end.

The Urban League both was approached by and approached other agencies and individuals in terms of this specific problem. Meanwhile, it went about the process of correlating facts, case histories, wage rates and similar material which would become assets to a proper understanding of the situation. In the process the field was narrowed down, closely

defined, and evaluated in terms of the facts. With every group with which the Urban League worked, community groups, white and colored, employers, and individual colored job seekers, the attempt was made to assist in defining the problem area.

To bring this out we may take a case in point. The wage rates for an elevator operator in the retail sales stores in 1944 were considerably above those of the salesgirl in the same store, in spite of commissions. The Urban League, upon learning these facts, relayed them to the interested groups for consideration.¹ The question posed was one stated as: "Would Negroes rather work for less money, in work of their own choosing or work of higher classification, than to swell their economic incomes by jobs of lesser skill which paid more?" The answer, without exception, helped to define the problem, and it was stated in the affirmative, that the Negro worker would rather work for less, for the opportunity of having a more "respectable" job, and also, a job which might well lead to other possibilities for upgrading. In other words, in 1944, the Negro opinion, to the extent that any group has unified opinion, was in favor of new inroads in American industry, even if it meant that a loss in real income was involved.

Identification of the Groups Involved

In the year 1944 several groups came to the fore as being particularly responsive to the problem of integration of Negroes in the retail store industry. As opposed to the various foci of generalized community groups and individuals, they presented a definite aim and objective;

¹ See p. 25 below.

namely, the desire to do something tangible about the problem. The characteristics of these groups were these: they had organized structure; their purposes were to promote better inter-cultural relationships; they were private, unofficial agencies; and their leadership consisted of fairly well-oriented personnel. It so happens that much of the leadership of the organized groups was white. Two of the larger groups were secular in nature, the other one was religious. As regards the knowledge of the problem, these groups were not naive, but were aware of the feelings of hostility on the part of the Negro community and the existence of discriminatory practices on the part of the industry in question.

Interestingly enough, the lines of communication converged almost simultaneously in time, and a conference was called by these groups and the Urban League in the early part of 1944. The Cambridge Community Relations Committee and the Boston Community Relations Committee provided early impetus to calling a meeting for the purpose of analyzing the situation. The Urban League was called in for the purposes of acting as a resource agency and a professional aide in developing procedure. Later on, one large branch of a church organization was added to the groups.

The above groups were, however, handicapped by the lack of professional personnel who could devote time to the project, and they therefore looked to the Urban League for this type of service, in addition to its consultation function.

The Urban League saw in these groups a type of status which was almost quasi-professional in nature. This was evident in their acceptance of the need for fact-finding, their recognition of their inadequacies in terms of lack of professional staff, and their desire to work

cooperatively and understandingly with the Urban League.

Out of the initial conference with these groups came these views.

A. The problems of the Negro population in the Boston area were acutely pointed up by limitations in the employment of Negro personnel in the retail store industry.

B. This industry seemed one offering chances of success for integration, owing to the current attitudes of the community, and the existence of "fair" employers with possibilities of enlisting their support.

C. Research, however, must precede any action, and before activity was initiated, there must be available personnel to carry the project through.

D. The Urban League was recognized as possessing the skills necessary to set up and carry through the leadership of the project, and through its knowledge of the field, to make a minimum of errors in its execution.

E. The Urban League, through its industrial department, was recognized as being aware of the human potentials for new jobs and was thought of as the organization which would study the labor potentials of the Negro group and make selection of workers for whatever new job openings were created.

F. The groups involved conceived of their role as being one of utilizing their cross-section nature as an asset of community good will. In terms of prestige and social standing, their group members had much to contribute, sometimes by the mere use of their names as being citizens interested in a certain project.

TABLE I

IDENTIFICATION OF THE GROUPS INVOLVED: RETAIL SALES PROJECT, 1944

GROUP	AIM	FUNCTION	RELATIONSHIP
The Negro Community of Boston	Fuller economic participation	Relays incidents of discriminatory experience	Works with groups for solutions to non-integration.
Greater Boston Community Relations Committee	Educational improvement in intercultural relations	Non-professional community organization, through projects	Provides leadership and motivation on the basis of facts from above group
Cambridge Community Relations Committee	Same as above, in Cambridge	Same as above	Same as above
Several Local Protestant Church Committees	Religious impetus toward bettering race relations	Developing projects in field of race relations	Same as above
Retail Sales Industry in the Boston Community	Business, and economic profits	In this case, identified as the scene of operations of the project	Identified as the group to be "sold" in terms of better business, and a better community
Organized Labor in Boston	Trade unionism	Organizes groups of workers for mutual interest in better working conditions	Non-discriminatory labor relations policy assures co-operation in inter-racial labor project
Urban League of Greater Boston, Inc.	Social Work	Leadership in community organization	Stimulating interest providing professional assistance to above groups

Analysis of the Role of the Urban League in Initial Planning

The accepting of the Urban League for leadership in this project may well be questioned. The explanation, however, is not complicated. In the Boston community considerable emphasis is placed upon the longevity of an organization, with almost the thought that length of existence is the main criterion of acceptability. In addition to this the Urban League had other advantages. Traditionally, it has been interested in fair opportunities; not blind allegiance to either the white or the colored group. Operations have been based upon research, and the distinction between blind aggression and consistent planning on the basis of facts is frequently observable in the trend of development of the agency. The Urban League, throughout the years, has come to be the agency which would provide facts, initiate programs, and work cooperatively along interracial lines. The importance of this cannot be underestimated in a project of this type. The prestige of being a Community Fund agency, with a professional staff, and with a good history, was a definite aid in the matter of delegation of the leadership role. This would appear to account for common acceptance of the leadership role of the Urban League.

Research as the First Step in the Process

In the early stages of the project, the Urban League pointed out the necessity of constantly referring to informational sources. Practically, the Urban League also indicated that there could be no real action until there was adequate professional personnel, and discussed this in the initial meeting in terms of the possibility of an additional worker coming on the Urban League staff, and asserted that if this were accomplished, the project seemed practical enough to warrant the new person's

being assigned to the project as a primary responsibility. Soon after, the possibility of a new worker became a reality, as the Community Fund approved the necessity on an experimental basis. This addition to the League staff made possible the fulltime assignment of one worker, along with additional staff assistance.

At the original meeting of the various groups, considerable experience was reported concerning the project. For example, there were some statements made which were completely erroneous, such as "no Negroes have ever worked for Store X"; "perhaps Negroes have never applied for such jobs, or don't have the necessary skills"; or, "Mr. Z. of the Y Store will go along with us." In general, while having a fair understanding of the problem, there existed the real need of the various groups to accumulate concrete evidence which would hold water. The League, because of day by day operations, had a large mass of material, as research is one of its functions and interests. On the other hand, however, its purpose came to be one of helping these groups in the process of carrying out a specific project. This indicated the need for fresh and specific information. The groups involved readily accepted this need, and assigned the responsibility to the League's personnel.

The League saw the need for facts as being based upon these questions:

1. To what extent are the retail sales industry representatives including Negroes in their employment patterns?
2. What are the attitudes of management toward present use, and fuller use, of Negro workers?

3. What comparisons can be made regarding the skills, working habits, absentee rates, etc., of the white worker and the Negro worker when the latter has been utilized?

4. Does the Negro community in Boston provide good potentials for new openings, if such are created? ¹

5. How will trade unions respond to the project?

6. To what extent is the general community ready to accept possible changes in employment policies?

Question number 5 was readily dismissed as being unnecessary, since League contacts with labor union representatives proved them to be very responsive to anything which could be done in the interests of Negro workers. Question number 6 was viewed as being one of the most difficult to evaluate properly. In spite of rather positive community attitudes in regard to better racial and cultural conditions, this point was seen as one exceptionally difficult to measure in advance. In general, however, most workers in the field of better intercultural relations were inclined to agree that Boston's democratic atmosphere was a positive advantage, and that strong anti-racial feelings were not characteristic of the community.

The Retail Store Survey was set up to be simple in nature, and to provide answers to the first three questions. In several cases the answer to question number 1 was already known to the League; but here again, the survey would reveal new information regarding the other points.

2 This point is very important, as lessexperienced groups have carried out similar projects which were successful in obtaining definite commitments from management, only to find that they would not produce workers of the necessary skill, abilities, or potentials to carry through the project!

The survey forms were discussed with the groups, as well as the choice of stores to be surveyed, and some indication of the value of the research. Further, it was decided that the element of timing was important and that the survey should be done quickly and with dispatch.

Gathering the Facts

Although the facts regarding the size of the retail store industry in Boston were not available, it may be noted that the retail store industry is a very large one in Boston, servicing not only the Boston area but also localities all over New England.

The problem of the selection of an adequate sample for the survey's purpose was solved by the application of the following criteria:

1. The stores selected would be easily accessible to the public; readily familiar to consumers; and offering strong sales appeals to the public.
2. Features of uniformity, such as being characteristic of the downtown Boston shopping area, were sought.
3. As employers, the stores selected were to have high, if not the highest rates of employment in terms of numbers of workers employed in the industry in Boston.

Ten stores were selected as meeting the above conditions, and were, therefore, the subjects of the survey. The survey was completed in about three weeks. In most cases, employers, or their personnel directors, were called for appointments. In some few cases "cold" appointments were made, directly at the company's office. In all instances, however, the material was gathered as a result of face to face interviews with some company representative in a relatively high position in terms of

TABLE II*

SURVEY OF THE EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS OF TEN REPRESENTATIVE STORES
RETAIL SALES PROJECT - 1944

STORE	PERSON CONTACTED	NUMBER OF NEGROES EMPLOYED	TYPES OF EMPLOYMENT OF NEGROES	LENGTH OF TIME EMPLOYED
A	Manager	50	Elevator operators, porters, stock-girls and bus-girls	Some over 20 years
B	Manager	16	Elevator operators, maintenance workers	Some up to 25 years
C	Manager	4	Elevator operators, stock-girls	Since 1942
D	Personnel Department Head	25	Maids, cleaners, bus-girls, girl cleaners in restuarant	Since 1930, approx.
E	Manager	5	Elevator operators, porter, pressers	"Before the war"
F	Manager	4	Elevator operators, porters, 1 window trimmer	Since 1930 or before
G	Personnel Department Manager	14	Elevator operators, waiting-room matron, cleaning, kitchen women	20 years
H	Manager	1	Stock-clerk	21 years
I	Manager	3	Elevator operators, porters	Since 1941
J	Personnel Department Manager	60	Elevator operators, cleaners, stock-girls	Since 1940

* Table continued on following page.

TABLE II
(continued)

STORE	JOB PERFORMANCE OF NEGROES	ABSENTEE RATE	JOB SECURITY	EMPLOYER ATTITUDES
A	Compares favorably with that of whites	Very high rate	Negroes to be retained on basis of skill	In long interview, manager appeared favorable to Negro workers
B	"Very good"	Same as whites	Good- in the same job classifications as present	Very negative - strongly opposed to jobs for Negroes in higher skills
C	"Very poor"	Very high	Satisfactory workers to retain present jobs	Strong resentment toward Negro workers... "experienced."
D	"Good"	Same as whites, generally	As above	Rather neutral, with interest in Negro workers in present jobs
E	Negroes called "slower"	Rather high rate	As above	No definite ideas, except repeated references to "slowness"
F	Negroes reported "very good workers"	Same as whites	As above	Firm reports good relationships with colored workers for many years
G	"Very good"	Very low compared with the white rate	As above	Company reports, "We couldn't do without our colored workers."
H	"Trustworthy, dependable, very good"	Low rate	As above	Company would hire Negro workers in better jobs if in the colored area
I	"These three workers are best in my 17 years here"	Lower than whites	As above	Store hires only West Indians - will never hire American Negroes
J	Very good	High rate in some jobs	As above	Store interested in present Negro workers in their present jobs

policy-making responsibilities. The length of the interview time varied, but went to as long a period as two hours. In some cases, the interviewees knew of the Urban League and its functions; in other cases, they did not, and were given interpretation of the Urban League in the course of the conference. In such cases where the Urban League was unknown, the interviewer found that being a "Red Feather Service" was helpful in gaining entrance and in opening up discussion of the subject. Immediately following the interview the interviewer wrote down, from notes, the material which had come out of the conference, including references to the important factor of the attitudes of the person interviewed, as well as the more objective data. Discussion of "attitudes" was the last portion of each interview. The interviewer used the plan of asking such questions as "In view of these facts, what do you think about the more full use of skilled Negro workers? Do you feel there is a chance for colored clerical workers or salespeople, either in the industry as a whole, or in your store?" Sometimes several questions, of similar content, were asked until the interviewer was satisfied that he had a fair interpretation of just how the interviewee felt. This was necessary, in certain cases, because the very same person who related a low rate of absenteeism on the part of Negro workers in the early part of the conference, would later say that he felt Negroes were not capable of doing more skilled work because of certain lacks on the part of the group regarding a sense of responsibility. This type of inconsistency between the objective facts and the feelings of the interviewee was finally resolved in every case, so that the results can be said to be quite accurate, even in the more non-objective area. The interviewer also did not feel that

he was placing the interviewee "on the defensive", since the pattern of 1944 in this industry was so consistently discriminatory; in other words, discriminatory practices were admittedly the reality factor, and no one interviewee felt the necessity of making explanations for these patterns in his own particular firm .

Summary of the Survey

The results of the survey may be summarized as follows. In 1944 the employment patterns of the retail sales industry, as reflected by the survey, were discriminatory with regard to the Negro group. Negroes were found to be employed in each of the companies surveyed, and the length of time of such employment varied from the period of the war- manpower shortage to a period of up to twenty five years. Negroes, in every case, were limited to the lower- skilled jobs in the industry offering little chance for advancement. On the other hand, job security on the basis of merit and personal qualifications was generally reported for the Negro group in the particular jobs held by the group. Although there was only one case of poor job performance reported, several cases of high rates of absenteeism were found. ³ Although employers were located who were generally interested in the problems of the working colored person, none were found to express either optimism or strong interest regarding the possibilities for the Negro's advance in the industry in the higher job classifications. ⁴

3 Quite generally, during this period, the League found that those employers late in hiring Negro workers reported more absenteeism among them. This is to be accounted for by the poor labor market occasioned by war conditions.

4 This is a strange fact, in view of the many new jobs then open to Negroes.

Use of the Survey by the Urban League

Upon formulating the results of the survey into summary form, leaders of the interested community groups were called together by the League for another planning meeting, according to prior arrangements. This meeting, which discussed the survey's significance, became the prelude to the next step in the project. Out of the meeting came the recommendation that top management of the industry should be called together as soon as possible. The group selected for this step was still another, ~~The~~ Governor's Committee for Racial and Religious Understanding, and selection was made on the basis of finding the organization which would command the most attention in terms of its prestige and standing in the community.⁵ That the selection was an ideal one was later shown by the cooperation coming from several company presidents and other top officials who came to a meeting held on November 22, 1944, at the request of one of the Committee members, an outstanding, influential judge. In calling the meeting, the letter which was sent out to the various company heads asked attendance at a meeting for the purpose of obtaining "opinion and advice concerning:

A. The upgrading of Negro workers presently employed in service occupations to sales positions, in accordance with usual procedure for selecting workers.

B. Use of Negro workers as salespeople during the Christmas rush."⁶

5 This committee was an unpaid committee, set up following the race riots in Detroit and other large American cities for the primary purpose of preventing similar outbursts of racial hostility.

6 Infra., Appendix, pp. 63-64.

The letter also extended the invitation to bring personnel directors with them to the meeting if the company heads wished to do so. Several of them did this.

Preparing for the Meeting

Considerable attention was given to the careful wording and preparation of a memorandum to be used at the meeting for providing the basis for discussion by retail sales industry personnel.⁷ In addition, an intensified search was made by the Urban League staff for likely Negro candidates, although this did not represent any departure from normal procedure except in the area of urgency.⁸ Further, the League knew of two individuals who would be present at the meeting because of the League's prior relationship with them in assisting them to find suitable personnel for service jobs in their stores. These individuals were contacted by the League prior to the meeting for the purpose of acquainting them with the fuller issues involved in the meeting, and to enlist whatever support they were willing to lend freely to the project. While no definite commitments were made, these two people constituted more fully informed members of the meeting. Indications seemed to point to the fact that the presence of League personnel would contribute nothing to the meeting of positive value, and might constitute a threat to the success of the gathering. It was therefore decided that the League would not attend the meeting.

Results of the Meeting

Five industry heads, in addition to the three members of the

7 Infra., Appendix, pp. 62- 64.

8 Infra., Selection of Workers, pp.

Governor's Committee and the Executive Secretary of the Governor's Committee, were present when the memorandum was presented to the group. In the discussion which followed, an impasse in the form of deep silence finally developed among the industry heads. The various issues had been fully discussed and ideas regarding the problem had been exchanged but there seemed to be no movement possible beyond this point. The stale-mated meeting was finally resolved when one company president, who did not believe upgrading of employees in his particular store to be possible in terms of their particular skills and abilities, asked the question about point B., as to where adequate Negro help could be found for these new classifications. He was told that the Urban League had already located a small group of potentially good people for the classification of salespersons. He followed his first question with a second, asking how many such persons the Urban League now knew of, and was told that there were about ten. He then said that in view of the fact that no one else was interested, he would hire all of this group immediately, and would begin to attempt to integrate Negroes in his store in terms of skill and qualifications. It so happened that he was one of the few persons who had shown particular interest in the project. The conference then ended with one definite commitment to a new policy in the industry, and proceedings of the meeting were subsequently reported to the Urban League.

Selection of Workers

The problem of the selection of workers assumes special significance in Urban League planning. Although it is in the process of eliminating such functions as job-placement, the League does, in certain specific cases, engage in this process. A term which quite adequately

explains the manner in which the League functions in the area is that of the National Urban League's "Pilot Placement Project", which has been going on for a number of years. In many respects, the Negro worker going into an employment situation in an industry which has previously hired only majority group members, is a "pilot", or a pioneer. There are many points at which such a worker must meet and face situations altogether unknown to the majority person. The white worker may be worried about such factors as how he will make out on a new job; whether or not the job will be satisfying to him; whether he will be able to get along well with fellow- employees and his employer; whether he has sufficient skill and ability, not only to succeed, but to grow and develop in the industry. In essence, he, the white worker going into a fresh job situation, is frequently insecure, upset, and usually in a state of emotional imbalance. The Negro worker, in addition to these problems, must deal with the factor of traditional discrimination toward people who look like himself. He must deal, further, with the fact that he represents a person who is "on the spot" in every sense of the term. The white employer is wondering about his adjustment possibilities, and he himself is wondering about them, for he knows that if he fails, the whole minority group of which he is a member may fail also. This "emotional weight", as it may be called, is a strong force with which to deal in the initial placement of minority group members in industries hitherto closed to them.

The Urban League has considerable evidence from case histories that the minority person is frequently the victim of discrimination in employment. It also has evidence of how the factor of discrimination

has been used by the minority client to satisfy individual needs which are not socially constructive, but are related simply to the emotional requirements of the client.

An example of this may be cited. A well known concern may justly earn the reputation of discriminating against Negro workers. The client may cite the "fact" that he applied to this particular concern but did not find any employment because he was colored. The League, working on the employer level, makes a contact and refers this client directly to the company, to a particular person for possible employment. The client does not show up after saying that he will go to the place of employment and apply. In this instance the client is "using" the factor of discrimination as a tool to help him justify his inability to face the work situation, with all its demands in terms of emotional maturity and adulthood. It is, in many cases, a useful, and seemingly logical defense for the minority worker.

In this particular project the problems of personnel were intensified. The League was in the position of locating workers, selecting them on the basis of qualifications, and, at the same, offering only the possibility of jobs to the individuals selected. If, after interest on the part of the person was aroused, there was no job forthcoming, the League could well be criticized if inadequate interpretation had been given. This may give some impression of the dynamics of selection involved in a special project. If emotional maturity and personal stability are requirements for available jobs, then we can see how much more the Urban League ~~was~~ asking for in selecting pioneers for this particular project. The persons selected had to be, in the opinion of the worker,

capable of handling additional personal frustration in the event that the project did not progress, and openings were not made.

Reducing the basis of selection to simple terms, the following characteristics were sought. First, the applicant or client had to have definite abilities or skills, or, in the case of lack of experience, good potentialities for retail sales work. This included such factors as appearance, pleasant personality, neatness, ability to relate well to other people, honesty, adequate ability to verbalize well, and similar points. Secondly, the individual had to possess a certain quality of ease with which the minority status was "carried". Evaluations were made in terms of how this person would react to insults based upon racial references, either real or fancied. As an aid in weighing this second factor, experience with majority group members on a pleasant basis was seen as being of exceptional help. Thirdly, it became the responsibility of the League worker to evaluate properly the degree of maturity of the individual, so that if, after creating interest in a new field of work, no openings were made, serious damage would not be done to the personality of the individual. An honest explanation of the possibilities of failure was found to be of definite help in working with prospects for the new openings, and a frank relationship became necessary and needed in this area.

In the initial selection of the "pioneers", the League's exceptional care reduced the possibility of error in many cases. Common characteristics appeared as the criteria were applied to the workers selected, who numbered at least two hundred by 1945. Usually, they were over twenty five years of age. Most were married and about one half

had children. Most of the group were active in community affairs in some way. The majority had had considerable work experience and had shown the ability to work and manage a household with a satisfactory division of time and effort. In all cases there was noted an interest in the problem and its solution, as the persons selected believed in the simple idea that if Negro workers were given equal opportunity in a new field, they, themselves, would convince management of the fallacy of discrimination. In all, elements of emotional maturity were observed, and the ability to discuss the problem was clearly in evidence. This group, in essence, knew the problem, were willing to be ready to do something about it on a demonstrative basis, and they would not be damaged personally if nothing came of the project.

Integration of Workers of Minority Background in the Retail Sales Field:

A Process

A new and rapid stage in the process of the retail sales project came into being as Negro workers in selling positions were introduced to Boston's consumers for the first time during the Christmas season of the year 1944. Salesgirls, previously selected by the Urban League, and subsequently referred to the Personnel Department of the first store to initiate non-discriminatory hiring, were at first automatically hired for the new positions, and were spread throughout the store in spots where they were needed to fill vacancies.

Characteristics of the process of integration, as carried out by management in this first store were these: in the first place, management established non-discrimination as company policy through its personnel department and the heads of departments and other supervisory

personnel. The policy, once enunciated and developed, would apply to all departments, without regard to any specialized or spot placement, as management has sometimes done when minority workers were first introduced in new work situations. Colored girls were placed in the front of the store, in the back of the store, on various floors, in one- girl departments, and with other girls. This feature of interspersion helped tremendously to establish clearly the intentions of management in this store to both customers and fellow- workers. It also had a secondary implication, in that the basis of placement was always in terms of store needs and worker qualifications. This approach of fairness to all groups, both majority and minority, in terms of need and ability, is a positive factor in establishing good employee morale. Here again the question of proper balance is most important to the success of such a project.

Paternalism, or favoritism toward Negro workers in the early stages of their introduction, would be just as detrimental to fair employment policies as would discrimination. In such a case, new hostilities, in the form of fear of job security and a capricious management policy, could easily be aroused in white workers. The introduction of Negro workers has to be carried out without raising threats of job displacement to white workers. This first store showed special sensitivity to these problems in dealing with them.

Role of the League in Early Integration

The Urban League was used to a large extent by management in the early stages of integration, not only by referring workers selected by the League, but as a constant consultant to management and personnel workers. Usually the content of the conferences included the presenta-

tion of simple problems by the store, with suggestions and interpretation being given by the League personnel. Strong feelings of mutuality grew out of repeated conferences, in person and by telephone, between these two groups.

It may be well to take an example of the dynamics of the project, as illustrated by the following:

..... Negroes were working in the store as salesclerks and clerical workers, but were not working on the elevators which were manned by white girls. Management advised the girls that they were putting colored workers on the elevators the following morning and that two had been accepted to operate empty cars. At closing time that evening, the elevator operators advised personnel that they would walk off their jobs in the morning if colored girls came to work with them. Management backed down and did not integrate the Negro workers at this time.

Later, the firm conferred with the Urban League, which suggested that a mistake had been made by the company's personnel department in not pursuing store policy. At the second attempt, management gave the white girls reassurance that their job security was not in danger as long as their individual performance was up to par. They further stated that they would not back down or be intimidated in carrying out policy. They used logic and persuasion in a group meeting and in individual meetings. It was through these conferences that the personnel department allayed and destroyed fears and misconceptions which had figured in the previously thwarted attempt at integration, concerning the use of common toilet and cafeteria facilities. These elevators are now inter- racially operated, and no difficulties have since been discovered. 9

It was felt that this incident, the only one of its kind to be reported, could have been avoided had management consulted the Urban League in advance as to the methods of effecting a change in policy, as it had in many previous situations involving Negro workers.

Of greater significance, however, was the matter of the individual adjustment of the minority worker. In this latter regard, the League

9 Francis E. Davis, The Boston Drama, Urban League Brochure, May, 1950, pp. 7- 8.

dealt with factors which had to do with the newness of the situation. In other words, the League stood ready to help personnel workers in their development in a new area of responsibility; namely, hiring and working with employees without discrimination. Although this may now seem to be a simple and unimportant responsibility, the League has ample evidence of the misconceptions and the preconceived attitudes which many majority group members have toward the minority group member. As an instance of this naivete, we may refer to the fact that white people frequently assume that every colored person in a certain locality knows personally every other colored person; or to the fact that most white people have difficulty in distinguishing one colored person from another- or at least, more difficulty than they would have in identifying varying white people.

The League saw its role as being one of providing continuing help by way of interpretation of some of what may be considered the most basic points in race relations. The simple assumption was that the white community and the Negro community are isolated islands within the whole community, and that the process of linking them together requires thought, understanding, and the ability to progress. The League's role was defined as being an enabling one in this area, and one which would help white and colored people alike to grow in maturity. Yet this role was one which had a time limit placed upon its functioning. The assumption was that as soon as personnel officers became used to dealing with racially differing people on an individual basis, there would no longer be the need of either Urban League selection, referral, or intensive interpretation.

Summary of the Process of Early Integration

The very existence of Negro workers, carefully selected for vocational adequacy, paved the way for a rather remarkable advance in the process of the integration of Negro workers in the retail sales field in Boston. This may be accounted for in a number of ways, but the most significant would seem to be:

- a. the high degree of job skill and performance on the part of the workers initially selected as pioneers.
- b. the high level of interest shown by management and personnel departments in the experiment.
- c. the considerable amount of positive interest shown by customers in reporting favorable comments to management.
- d. the over- all interest of fellow- workers in a store policy of non- discrimination.
- e. the cooperation of trade unions in the field.
- f. the demands for manpower which continued to be a strong need of management.
- g. the improved atmosphere of the area with regard to better race relations.
- h. (later) fair employment practices legislation, outlawing employment discrimination.

The operation of the above factors produced such rapid changes in the field that even some of the original planners were amazed at the results. The process developed from no stores employing Negro sales or clerical workers in the fall of 1944, to one store employing thirty such workers early in 1945, to approximately five stores employing a

total of over two hundred such workers in 1946, and to some twelve stores, including the original ten surveyed, employing many more such workers in the year 1950. In addition, there were a number of other stores which more gradually followed the trend of the industry. Actually, there are other factors of more significance than numbers in the area of fair employment policies.

The number of Negroes employed by a given concern is viewed by the League as being insignificant when compared to the types of jobs assigned to Negroes, the levels placed upon upgrading and advancement, and the overall pattern of employment policies. The company which plays fair with employees will report varying numbers of Negroes working in various positions, for their policies reflect movement, in and out of the company, and horizontally and vertically within the firm. The progress shown by the process of integration in the stores by the year 1950 reflects the quality of the development. Long before the inception of legal restraints upon employment discrimination, the pattern was established as being one of placing the best qualified worker in the best position in many of the leading retail stores in Boston. As a matter of fact, it was interesting that one of the few employers to testify in favor of outlawing discrimination before a legislative committee of the Commonwealth, was the company president who had been the first to inaugurate the new policy in his firm. In his remarks, he stated that he felt that the fears of employers would not be justified if they played fair in hiring and upgrading, and he recommended such a policy for best results in terms of enlightened business practices. He was, at the same time, in favor of a law which would require the abolition of discrimination in employment,

and was one of the most effective proponents of the legislation.

Developments in the Process to the Present Date

In the spring of 1950, the original stores were re-surveyed by the writer. In many cases the original contact was interviewed. The emphasis of the second survey took on new aspects. In the first place, the requirements of the Fair Employment Practices Commission made the keeping of statistical accounts of the **number** of Negro or white personnel illegal except for statistical purposes. For this reason, the League did not feel it wise to ask questions about the number of Negroes employed in certain categories of employment. Secondly, accurate answers in question-areas which might incriminate members of the industry were too much to expect. Thirdly, the success of the project had progressed to the stage where no employer could be expected to oppose integration, and subjectiveness in his statements could be expected in the defense of his particular store, if his store happened to need "defending."

The above analysis led the investigator into a search for such facts as, some of the new jobs currently being held by Negroes, examples of any difficulties encountered in relationship to the process of integration, examples of how management thought the process could best be

10 The Act, under Chapter 368 of the General Laws, was approved May 23, 1946, and set up a Commission, to be known as the Fair Employment Practices Commission. The powers of the Commission were recently broadened, in 1950. The Commission, in the employment field, conciliates and adjudicates cases where an aggrieved individual presents bona fide evidence of discriminatory practices by an employer, a labor union, an employment agency, or even on the part of fellow workers. To date no cases have been tested in the courts in any of the several states having such laws, but several cases have been successfully conciliated in such a manner as to eliminate discrimination. The Commission also has broad educational powers, and considers its role largely an educational one.

carried out, and examples of the job performance and total job adjustment of Negro workers in the industry, as well as their opportunities for maintaining their present positions in the event of acute cut-backs or industry recessions.

Although no direct questions were asked about the extent of numerical integration, answers were obtained in almost every case. The re-survey revealed that exceptional gains had been made in the job-classifications of salesgirl, salesman, buyer, assistant buyer, credit-office worker, personnel worker, sales trainee, executive sales trainee, advertising personnel; and in addition, gains had been made in all job classifications in the industry, including those of the service occupations.

From the qualitative standpoint, several new positions were found, such as an executive secretary of a management council, a personnel worker doing a specialized and new job of setting up a new system of great importance to the store's operations, an executive sales trainee in a program which places practically no ceiling on the individual's ability to advance, and a person carrying high responsibilities in a key department in one store. On the training level, also, there was indicated a strong departure from 1944. Colored girls are now being assigned for training programs in the sales field from local high schools, when in 1944 most vocational guidance personnel discouraged such vocational interests on the part of Negro girls on the grounds that they would not be hired because of their color.

Other striking contrasts appeared. No representative of the industry indicated either high rates of absenteeism or poor quality of job performance. No reference was made to any difference, with regard to

white or colored rates or comparisons. A high degree of emphasis was found to be placed upon skill and ability as basic requirements. No stores reported any opposition on the part of any group, either customer, fellow- employee, union or personnel; with many stores reporting favorable comments coming from all sources.

Interesting contrasts were made when the section of the original survey called "Employer Attitudes" was compared to the statements of the industry heads in 1950. The latter statements universally reflected the fact that few employers in 1950 wanted to feel that they formerly discriminated against minority workers. As a matter of fact, several fallaciously laid claims to having been the "first to help the colored people." Most employers gave indication that they wanted to feel that they always had been in complete and active agreement with fair play in employment relations.

Interpreting the Project

The field of social work generally is in need of more stress upon interpretation so as to narrow down the misconceptions and lack of understanding of the public. In recent years, professional workers have become conscious of the tremendous needs in this area.

Essentially, the very nature of a community problem is predicated upon a lack of knowledge or understanding of needs, problems, resources, techniques and methods. When interest appears in the problem of a "sore-spot" situation, it has been preceded by early exploration of the nature of the problem. As interested groups begin activity in such an area, the need for interpretation mounts, and becomes the additional responsibility of the professional worker.

Throughout the project, the author was continuously impressed by the extent of the need for information on the part of the groups which participated in the process. Frequently explanations were made on very simple levels and in terms of very basic material. The content of the interpretive process varied according to group needs. The groups, in this case, fell into three categories.¹¹

Each phase of the project appeared to require a somewhat different focus. In the research aspect, the need for facts, the usefulness of information and the problem of unifying method with reality factors came to be the main need around which interpretation was necessary. The process of evaluating the information required emphasis being placed upon how, and in what manner the facts could be best used. Finally, in the planning stage, interpretation regarding the manner and methods to be used in the actual process of integration became the primary need.

In illustrating some of the situations which arose, several varied examples may be taken. Several members of the community groups felt quite certain that almost any Negro job-seeker would be able to work satisfactorily as a salesperson if there were no discriminatory barriers in his way. Urban League personnel pointed out, in the group meeting at which this point came up, that such was not the case, and that proper selection in terms of abilities, skills and potentialities of the applicant for a new job situation assumed exceptional importance to the success of the entire project.

¹¹ See Table III, *supra*.

TABLE III
GROUP INTERPRETIVE NEEDS
RETAIL SALES PROJECT

GROUP	FOCUS	CENTRAL INTERPRETIVE NEED
Community good-will groups; community relations, and church committees	Aims to improve community relations and to improve conditions of minority groups	Practical facts, to aid objectives. Knowledge of labor needs; job requirements; extent of Negro skills; community resources which apply to program objectives
Top management and personnel officials; trade union personnel	Sound business policies leading to profits	Information concerning availability and skills of Negro workers; facts about non-discriminatory examples in industry; human relations facts
The Negro Community in Greater Boston	Interest in more equal rights, economic, in this case	Information concerning resources; need for training and education; job requirements; best use of skills; new possibilities of non-discriminatory work

One employer raised the question as to whether or not separate toilet facilities should be provided in the event that Negro workers were integrated in his store. Here it was necessary to point out the fact that such discriminatory policies would create a tremendous amount of hostility on the part of Negro workers and set up unfounded distinctions upon the part of the white workers. The responsibility for the selection of wholesome personnel, of whatever group, was placed upon the shoulders of management as its own special interest.

One trade union official was found to be of the opinion that the presence of Negro workers in the store would hamper the union's organization drive in the store, on the grounds that Negro workers had been, and would continue to be anti-union in sympathy. The role of the Negro in the movement of organized labor was interpreted to this official as being a role largely determined by the negative attitude of both labor and management. It was necessary to point out that many trade unions had been guilty of the same kind of discrimination as management, and had thought of the Negro worker as a hostile, unpredictable enemy, without ever considering the possibility of enlisting the Negro as a friend having common interests and a common goal.

From still another viewpoint, the Negro community frequently expressed a pessimistic attitude toward new opportunities in the employment field and a lack of understanding of the skills, abilities and kind of requirements necessary to make a satisfactory work adjustment in a job area traditionally closed to minority group members. It appeared important to interpret the whole range of possible openings, and the needs

for skill as a basic requirement for employment. This portion of the total process of interpretation was perhaps the most difficult because of the historical pattern of discrimination toward minorities in American culture. On the basis of experience, frequently of a very personal type, Negroes had many reasons to be suspicious, resentful and pessimistic about theoretical changes in the usual procedure. Through personal contacts, by means of press releases and speaking engagements before Negro groups, Urban League personnel attempted to relate the incidence of new and changing factors in the status of the colored person as a worker. For example, once the project was under way and Negroes were working in several stores, there could no longer be any doubt that certain companies intended to hire Negro workers and white workers on the basis of ability and qualifications. Personal observation in one of the stores was enough to convince the most skeptical of the intentions of management. The presence of colored workers in new positions gave living evidence of striking innovations in the traditional pattern.

Another facet of the problem of interpretation concerns the methods by which the Urban League assisted in the flow of information from group to group in the project. The media used consisted of telephone conversations, personal interviews, formal memoranda communicated to the groups involved, summaries and bulletins issued at points where specific information seemed indicated, press releases and radio programs designed to tell the story of the problems, progress and dynamics of a changing idea in human relations.

"The Boston Drama", an additional attempt at interpretation, was

12

prepared and published in the spring of 1950. The working plan for the piece consisted of the aim of presenting a brief but cogent picture of the project. The cover, a large aerial photograph of Boston Common, the Public Gardens and the skyline over some of the stores involved, was used for its ability to attract interest and attention. The total setup was planned to keep printing costs at a minimum without destroying reader interest. Simplicity, frequently difficult to attain, became the objective.

Particular care was given to the audiences which the Urban League wished to reach. As an example of the thinking behind this point, the National Publicity Council for Health and Welfare Services states:

The most effective bulletins of all are those that know exactly what they intend to accomplish. The formula for incisiveness is quite easy, though its application requires tough and consistent thinking. It consists of a careful definition of the group or groups you want your bulletin to reach, and above all, of a precise understanding of the reaction you hope to produce. 13

The audiences to which this brochure was addressed were seen as:

1. Potential new employers of qualified Negro workers, in the same field or in other field.
2. Present employers, most of whom had received numerous requests for information concerning their experiences in this field from other employers both locally and nationally- in other words, as a public relations service through cooperative employers.
3. Board and committee members of the Urban League.

12 See Appendix, "The Boston Drama"

13 Helen Cody Baker and Mary Swain Routzahn, How to Interpret Social Welfare, p. 83.

4. The general public, including personnel of other social agencies, for the purpose of acquainting them with recent progress of import to their field.

As to a "precise understanding of the reaction you hope to produce", the League was interested in describing the changes accomplished in the field of increased economic opportunities for Negroes. From the League's daily contacts it was well known that few average people, and indeed, few Negroes themselves, had a conception of how fundamentally changed the picture had become by 1950. The League wanted employers to know that fair employment policies were being carried out with success and that the process presented very few difficulties.

As soon as the first proofs were returned from the printer they were taken to a well known feature writer, and a person particularly interested in social work interpretation. Miss Laura Haddock, of the Christian Science Monitor, wrote a feature story about the project which was printed several days before the release of the brochure. The article appeared on the second page and liberally quoted from "The Boston
14
Drama". On May 15, 1950, Honorable Leverett Saltonstall, Senator from Massachusetts, during a congressional debate on the proposed federal Fair Employment Practices Act, asked for and received unanimous consent to have the Monitor article printed in the Appendix of the Congressional
15
Record of that day.

The insertion of the material of the project in the Congressional

14 Christian Science Monitor, May 10, 1950, p. 2.

15 Congressional Record of the 81st Congress, Second Session, May 15, 1950, Appendix, pp. A3829- A3830.

Record had the effect of widening the audience considerably. To date, several trade journals, such as Women's Wear Daily, for example, have included articles on the material. Various large national publications have shown interest by requesting copies of the brochure, to be used as examples of new **trends**.

This brings us to the point of why this particular project should be interesting to a number of groups. The League is of the opinion that the retail sales field is one of exceptionally close contact between the sales person and the customer. Stores have long been aware of this fact, and have for this reason sought personnel of a very high type for such
 16
 positions. In one of the most difficult job situations from the standpoint of the Negro gaining admission to higher classifications, the Negro showed skill and ability at making an easy and sound adjustment. Employers, fellow workers, and customers also found great simplicity in the adjustment.

In many other areas of its operations the Urban League experiences substantial difficulty in interpreting the various facets of the problem to the diverse audiences. In this project, however, unusual difficulties were not noted.

16 One store in particular for many years has made a practise of recruiting sales people from the graduating classes of local universities and still obtains personnel from such sources.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This thesis undertook an analysis of a project carried out by the Industrial Relations Department of the Urban League of Greater Boston and designed to integrate Negroes in the retail sales industry.

Certain questions were posed as to the method and direction of this undertaking in view of the fact that it does not fall within the organized framework of reference of formal social work practise.

Prior to introducing the data, the writer outlined the history and philosophy of the Urban League. The writer attempted to present some of the scope of the League's operations and to show some of the changes in its emphasis. An attempt was also made to outline the philosophical orientation of the agency as being especially interested in the development of democratic social work procedure as a solution to the problem of discrimination in America.

A brief resume of the objectives of the Industrial Relations Department was given in order to bring out this aspect of the Urban League's approach and objectives. Certain changes in the approach were also indicated.

The thesis tried to explore the application of social work techniques and methods in terms of a specific project. In certain aspects of the process the details are not easily observable as contributions to the field of social work, or even as definite characteristics of the process by which the situation of a community problem is finally resolved.

The approach of the situation, as it developed from its inception

through to its present status may be characterized by Wayne McMillen, as he states:

The professional component of the community organization process in social work is thus twofold. The social worker is concerned (1) to stimulate people to use their powers for the cooperative improvement of group life and (2) to assist in the development of the process of supplying the technical services required.¹

Frequently used methods involved in the project were those of (1) research, (2) planning, (3) evaluation, and (4) interpretation. Additionally there were techniques applied which could only have to do with a rather specialized problem in community organization, such as in the case of race relations. Among these, we may include the special problem of the selection of workers which required the use of case work and vocational guidance skills, the unique necessity for interpretation of a basic nature on the various levels of the project and the demands for the development of close relationships with store managers and personnel directors.

The usefulness of specific information related to the Negro group was clearly evident in the course of the study's development. To fully understand the role of the Negro group, it is necessary to be aware of components of what is called the "Negro Problem" and some of the many dynamic factors within its scope. This point would seem to increase the responsibilities of leadership on the part of a social worker engaging in such a project and at the same time increase the necessity for interpretation to groups and between groups in a community situation.

It would appear that the project involved the total community, and

1 Wayne McMillen, Community Organization for Social Welfare, 1945, p.25

not simply the Negro community. At the present time there is considerable evidence of groups in the community which are alive to the possibilities of using the Negro's job status as a springboard for political action "for the Negro". Although few aware people recognize this as a sincere objective, such use of the Negro is productive of a type of Negro nationalism totally unrelated to the kind of a community in which we live. The high degree of enthusiasm produced among the employer group, all of whom were white, would appear to indicate that constructive, satisfying attitudes arose in this group as well as among Negroes who found new opportunities in the economic scene.

The value of the study may be limited in spite of definite gains which have been created. It does not necessarily follow that success in a project in the retail sales field would also be forthcoming if the identical techniques were applied to a different industrial field at a different time.

In the procedure, however, disciplined by social work knowledge and assisted by social work skills, the project would appear to be an adequate example of how and by what means the process of integration of Negro workers in closed industries may be programmed. Lasting success, as far as the specific project is concerned, may not be evident or established, but success in terms of the orderly development of a community organization approach to a situation differing from usual social welfare problems, would see to be in evidence.

Approved



Richard K. Conant
Dean

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APPENDIX

Schedule

Date _____

1. Person and company contacted.
2. Address.
3. Time and place of meeting.
4. Number of Negroes employed.
5. Types of employment.
6. Length of time Negroes employed.
7. Job performance.
8. Absenteeism.
9. Job security.
10. Employer attitudes:
 - (a) What do you feel constitutes the Negro's problem in employment?
 - (b) What are the chances for Negro upgrading in your industry?
 - (c) What upgrading opportunities are there in your company?
 - (d) What would prevent Negroes from (a) selling, (b) doing clerical work?

MEMORANDUM ON THE EMPLOYMENT OF NEGROES

AS SALESPERSONS IN DEPARTMENT STORES

November 8, 1944

This memorandum has been prepared by the Cambridge Community Relations Committee, the Boston Community Relations Committee, and the Urban League of Greater Boston, Inc. These groups have been thinking frankly and seriously about the problem of employment as it affects Negroes in the Boston area.

I.

Findings of a recent survey on employment in downtown department stores.

A recent survey of employment has been made, covering ten stores in the downtown area. Results may be summarized as follows:

1. All stores employ Negroes and have for some time. Several have employed Negro personnel for many years.
2. The job performance and absentee rate, with but few exceptions, have been consistent with that of the non-Negro group.
3. Relations between white and non-white workers were reported harmonious, and presented no unusual problems for personnel departments.
4. No negative customer reactions to the use of Negro labor in existing job classifications was discovered by the survey.
5. Work being done by Negroes consists of the following classifications: porters, maids, dishwashers, bus-boys, bus-girls, waitresses, stockpersons, and elevator operators.
6. A sample of employer attitudes as given by personnel representatives and, in some cases, by managers, include the following:

"We couldn't do without them. I have no complaints."

"..... company started hiring Negro help because it seemed better than any help available in the labor market today."

"Very good workers, trustworthy and dependable."

"I find no fault with them. They are good workers."

"These three employees are the best workers I've ever had in my 17 years of department store experience. They are loyal."

"Our several colored employees are a credit to the store."

II.

The Need for This Plan Now

It has been reported by downtown Boston's retail stores that pre-Christmas sales are up from fifteen to twenty per cent over those of 1943. This would indicate new problems for management as regards the personnel needs created by strong buying at a time when available labor is scarce. Further utilization of Negro labor at this time would ease the pressure of finding adequate personnel.

III.

Precedents

It may be noted that Lord and Taylor of New York City has initiated a program of upgrading Negro workers to positions as salespersons.

IV.

Community Attitudes and Patterns

Community attitudes relative to seeing Negroes in their present job classifications are favorable. This attitude may or may not be favorable when Negroes are seen behind the counters as salespersons. This we do not know because it has not been tried on a large scale here. However, we feel that the pattern in our Boston community life as a whole would be conducive to favorable attitudes, perhaps more than any other large city in the nation.

May it be noted here that the relations between white and Negro employees has proven to be no problem whatever. Experience of our federal, state and local agencies and departments has shown that both groups can work together harmoniously and efficiently.

Recommendations

Based upon the above thinking and facts, the following methods are suggested as possible procedures for the integration of Negro workers into sales positions for department stores.

- A. The upgrading of Negro workers presently employed in service occupations to sales positions, in accordance with usual procedure for selecting workers.

Employees showing ability and adaptation in one job classification could be considered for other store positions which have higher prestige value to the individual. Thus, employees with ability may feel that if they perform their jobs well, any phase of the store's operations is open to them. It is believed that such a policy on the part of management would be significant in the matter of raising personnel standards and employee interest. The skills and abilities of some of the workers already

employed are known to management and this knowledge would help in the selection of workers. It is believed that the group of Negroes presently employed represents a reservoir of labor which could be more fully utilized to the advantage of both groups.

B. Use of Negro workers as salespeople during the Christmas rush.

New workers will be needed, especially for the Christmas rush period, as indicated by current help wanted advertisements in the Boston newspapers. The Urban League of Greater Boston is in a position to help recruit competent workers to fill this need. Use of Negro help during this period would enable management to meet employment needs and also discover first-hand information relating to the use of such labor. It is hoped that through such a trial experience, management would find employees capable of holding down permanent sales positions and would employ them.

The two methods suggested above are not mutually exclusive. One or the other or both could be attempted.