

URBAN LEAGUE ADJUSTMENTS
TO THE "NEGRO REVOLUTION":
A CHICAGO STUDY¹

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During its fifty-year history, the Urban League in Chicago, a legacy of World War I and the Negro migration, has had to adjust to wars, post-war reconstructions, depressions and the social disorganization produced by racial violence; but none of these adjustments compared in depth and significance with that required during the hectic 1960's.

From its beginnings the Urban League movement has been considered the most conservative of the major organizations working in the field of race relations. The movement began around 1911 as an interracial organization in New York City, with the purpose of applying the methods and techniques of social work to the problems facing Negroes in cities, especially the migrants from the rural South. Using the social work methods of research, community organization, education and negotiation, the League worked to open jobs for Negroes. At the same time, it helped in the adjustment of Negro workers by teaching them proper work habits and modes of acceptable social behavior. During periods of racial crisis, white power groups usually preferred to work through the Urban League in making small concessions to quiet Negro discontent. In the 1960's, however, Negroes began to repudiate both individuals and organizations which tried to play the accommodating role between the white power structure and the Negro community.

In a letter to Arthur Kruse of the Community Fund of Metropolitan Chicago, Whitney M. Young, executive director of the National Urban League, epitomized the dilemma facing the Chicago League at this time. "The Urban League movement," Young wrote in 1962, "if it is to continue to be of service . . . , cannot close its eyes to the new and real revolution of expectation which has become internalized in practically every Negro citizen, and which has created an entirely different climate and mood." He continued:

For us to ignore this fact of life and not relate to it, while at the same time attempt to maintain the uniqueness and basic integrity of our program, would not only invite contempt and disrespect, but -- more tragic for Chicago and other communities -- would result in the loss of leadership to fanatic and irresponsible groups waiting to seize

any opportunity to exploit racial problems and convert now-tense situations into violent holocausts.²

The Chicago League was faced with the problem of trying to maintain the confidence and respect of the Negro community by relating positively to the new movements astir in the city and by adjusting its programs and policies to make them relevant to the rapidly changing times without alienating important supporters and endangering its existence. This was the third time within two decades that the organization found it necessary to make such adjustments. During World War II, the agency lost support among Negroes when it seemed unable to keep up with the accelerated tempo of race relations fostered by the war. In 1946 the League's board of directors fired the executive director, Albon L. Foster, and two other top staff members. To replace Foster, Sidney Williams, who had a reputation for militancy, was employed to reorganize the League's operations and to reshape its image among Negroes.³

Williams succeeded too well in carrying out his mission. By the early 1950's the League was being attacked by pro-segregation groups, such as the White Circle League. Of greater significance, however, were the severe criticisms leveled by Urban League supporters among conservative white business and professional groups. Finally, in November, 1954, the Community Fund, claiming that the League was causing it to lose contributions, threatened to drop the League as a member agency unless drastic changes were made in Urban League operations. Confronted with this ultimatum, the Chicago League, in July, 1955, released the executive director and all but two members of the staff and suspended operations for six months. During the interim, the agency formulated a new statement of policy, began a campaign to recruit more board members from among leading business and professional groups and employed a new executive director, Edwin C. Berry, who combined aggressiveness with diplomacy and administrative ability.⁴

The Chicago League, with the improvements made in its operations between 1955 and 1960, was in a better position than most other local Urban Leagues to adjust to the 1960's. Nevertheless, any modifications had to be made with due regard to the constraints imposed by the agency's perennial concerns -- especially fund raising -- and by its relations with the Community Fund and other groups and organizations in the city. Considering the internal and external difficulties involved, perhaps the crowning achievement of the Chicago Urban League in the 1960's was its adjustment to the "Negro Revolution."

Revisions in programs and methods were neither initiated nor instituted in spectacular ways. Fortunately for the League, such an approach was not needed to gain the confidence of the Negro community, for it probably would have resulted in the loss of many white supporters. The fact that the agency was able to retain the confidence and respect of the Negro

community resulted from one of the paradoxes of the reorganization and rebuilding period. Actually, the Chicago League was largely conservative in orientation from 1955 to 1960; but Edwin C. Berry, as executive director, managed to project a militant image for the agency, even while keeping his speeches and other pronouncements within the limits of rather conservative policies set by the board of directors.

Often it was not what Berry said but the reaction to it that produced and sustained the reputation for militancy. In 1957, for instance, speaking to fellow officials at the National Urban League's conference in Detroit, Berry characterized Chicago as the most segregated large city in the United States. This speech drew an immediate rebuttal from Mayor Richard Daley and a critical editorial from the Chicago Tribune. The editor of the Chicago Daily Defender, however, expressed the general reaction of the Negro community when he asserted: "Mr. Berry did not exaggerate a bit when he criticized Chicago. In fact, he was too restrained, too mild in his description of the evil forces at work in this metropolis."⁵ Several weeks later, Berry told the board of directors that requests for staff members "to speak, consult and counsel with all types of community groups have more than doubled since the Tribune editorial over any comparable period during the existence of the reorganized Chicago Urban League."⁶ The repetition of such incidents, along with actual accomplishments, facilitated the retention of Negro support.

In interpreting and justifying increasingly aggressive activities to somewhat conservative white supporters, there were two effective procedures available. On the one hand, it could be pointed out that the League could not accomplish anything without Negro support. This argument was included in the board of director's reply to the criticisms following the Detroit speech. A statement released by board president Nathaniel O. Calloway declared that the Negro citizens of Chicago "look to the Urban League to reveal the truth, without fear or favor." Furthermore, "those who would like to see the Chicago Urban League become docile and subservient should realize that such an Urban League would be worthless, even to themselves."⁷ The second technique for justifying more militant actions was to place them within the context of accepted Urban League procedures; in other words, to maintain that what the agency was doing was in keeping with time-honored policies and methods of the Urban League movement. The two techniques were supplementary and mutually reinforcing.

Although the process of adjustment accelerated in tempo during the 1960's, it was still gradual and rather subtle. As long as a favorable image could be maintained among the agency's diverse constituency, Urban League leaders preferred that publicity center on programs and accomplishments, rather than on internal adjustments. Moreover, the more permissive climate in race relations which accompanied the "Negro Revolution" made many aggressive Urban League actions seem relatively moderate.

Then, too, adjustment involved much more than questions of militancy and moderation. The growing intensity of the struggle for Negro equality poignantly highlighted the complexity and interrelatedness of the multiple barriers facing Negroes in Chicago and other cities throughout the country. Negro leaders came to realize that the breaching of one barrier in the vicious circle of segregation and discrimination might have little effect on the Negro's general plight. It was long recognized that housing was a key issue, but open occupancy, without improvement in other areas, would not benefit those most in need of better housing. Without jobs Negroes living in slums could not escape, even if given the opportunity. Conversely, improved economic conditions would not necessarily bring better housing. The ability to take advantage of employment opportunities, moreover, required levels of education and training not being reached by children in the largely segregated schools in Negro ghettos. In addition, complacency and resignation, born of family disorganization and poverty, stood as barriers to taking advantage of even the educational opportunities available.

Under such conditions, piecemeal attacks on less sensitive points and a few grudging concessions would not satisfy the Negro's cry for "freedom now." The tremendous rise in Negro expectation and the demands made on Negro leadership to bring fulfillment of these expectations became sources of bewilderment for many whites and sources of great challenge to Negro leaders. Samuel Lubell, in his book White and Black: Test of a Nation, voiced this white bewilderment when he stated:

Currently the more militant Negro leadership seems bent on transforming the whole country into one national arena of this struggle. By stirring tensions at enough points of society, these militants appear determined to involve each of us ever more deeply in their grievances, to leave us no escape from their clamors for "freedom now," no place to hide from taking sides⁸

The most common expression of this bewilderment, however, was the often-repeated question: "What do the Negroes really want?"

The challenge to Negro leadership was twofold. In the first place, they had to continue and redouble their efforts to open the gates of opportunity. On the other hand, they had come to realize that opportunity alone was not enough. Negroes had to be able to take advantage of opportunities made available to them. Edwin C. Berry lamented in 1963 that "if full freedom came today -- equality of opportunity -- Negroes would not have one more job, one more good house, one whit more education than they had the day before it came."⁹ Berry and other Urban League leaders, along with the leaders of other organizations, realized that in large measure this called for work beyond boycotts, picket lines and demonstrations. These were important, but the next step was for Negroes to prepare themselves through

education, training and stable families to enter the mainstream of American life.

Leaders of the Chicago Urban League accepted both of these challenges, but the major emphasis of Urban League programing, as it had been traditionally, would be in working beyond the picket line. League officials felt that their agency was uniquely qualified to carry the message of the second step to the Negro community and to secure white cooperation, especially that of business and industrial leaders, in reaching program goals in this area.

The greater efficiency and flexibility in administrative organization instituted after 1956 facilitated adjusting Urban League programs to meet the demands of the "Negro Revolution." The pre-1956 programing departments -- industrial relations, public education (public relations) and community organization -- were reorganized and renamed. Only the research department retained its old title. The employment and guidance, community education and community services departments had broader responsibilities and were more flexible in approach than their antecedents. Although each department concentrated primarily on programs within its own area, unified projects and shifts in emphasis took place without severe disruption of routine functions.

The reorganized departments received their first real test in 1961 when the employment and guidance department worked with the other departments to get fair employment (F. E. P.) legislation through the Illinois General Assembly. After fourteen years of failure, success finally came in 1961. The Urban League employed its full complement of tactics to help achieve this victory in the war against discrimination in employment. Over the years, there had been many individuals and groups working separately and conjointly for a F. E. P. law in Illinois, and they all contributed in varying degrees to the final result. Nevertheless, Urban League activities were such in 1961 that Berry could boast that "the Urban League made the difference."

The publicized aspects of the League's work and most of its covert activities adhered closely to traditional methods. In December, 1960, the Urban League board unanimously reaffirmed the agency's unequivocal stand in favor of fair employment practices and pledged a continuation of "research, educational, organizational, and cooperative activities" leading to the passage and acceptance of a F. E. P. law.¹⁰ Now the departments could launch programs within the limits prescribed by this resolution. Research furnished the "facts and figures" for testimony before legislative committees and for use in mobilizing community groups. The community services department had the task of working with and through organizations of all types throughout the state to marshal public support.¹¹ Berry described this work as follows:

We did all the regular things involved in community organization -- we visited groups and leaders -- we provided them with educational materials and know-how in planning and programming -- we exploited mass media always playing up the contribution of others. We studied the pressure points -- we made sure that the constellation of supporting agencies and groups gave expression of approval to the legislative supporters of F. E. P. . . . and that they worked with those in the Senate who had to be convinced if we were to win.¹²

The culmination of what Berry termed the "public and flamboyant" part of the League's program was a leadership conference sponsored by the employment and guidance department. Some 1,000 representatives of 400 different organizations met at Dunbar High School on February 25, 1961. They listened to speakers explain the need for and the purpose of F. E. P. legislation, describe the provisions of the bill to be introduced in the legislature and exhort them as to what they and their organizations could do to promote passage of the bill. The representatives also spent an hour in workshop sessions discussing specific ways to help in the campaign.¹³ Commenting editorially on the conference, the editor of the Daily Defender declared that it had succeeded in "inoculating the people against the pernicious fallacy of indecision and inaction." Furthermore, the Chicago Urban League had demonstrated "with conviction that the people of this community are ready for constructive and effective action."¹⁴

Once people had been motivated to act, some organization needed to coordinate their activities and bring pressure to bear where it would count -- on members of the General Assembly. The Urban League could not, however, perform this function. By policy and because of the danger of losing its tax-exempt status, the League was prohibited from lobbying on legislative matters. This did not prevent the League and its individual officials and board members from cooperating with organizations that did lobby. Such an organization, the Illinois Committee for Fair Employment Practices, had existed for some time. Professor James Q. Wilson found, however, that it had been hampered in the 1940's and most of the 1950's by disunity among Negro organizations; lack of financial support from Negroes; and some rivalry "between the state NAACP conference and white groups as to which should organize the FEPC campaign."¹⁵

After 1959 the Chicago Urban League was in a better position to help infuse new life into the Illinois Committee, and the NAACP had also become stronger and more stable by this time.¹⁶ During the 1961 campaign, the Urban League worked actively with the Illinois Committee. Richard J. Nelson, manager of the civic affairs division of Inland Steel Corporation, served as its chairman; League president Joseph H. Evans was secretary, and League vice president Hugo B. Law was chairman of the public relations

committee.¹⁷ The Committee did a good job of mobilizing support for the bill.

Yet, in the final analysis, the fate of the measure depended on whether or not enough Republican votes could be obtained to get it through the senate. In the fifty-eight member senate -- consisting of thirty-one Republicans and twenty-seven Democrats -- thirty votes were needed to pass the bill. The Illinois Committee felt that twenty-five, or possibly twenty-six, Democrats could be counted on to vote for passage. Only one Republican, however, had voted for F. E. P. in 1959. Of seven new Republican senators, the positions of six were uncertain, but three had indicated that they might be persuaded to vote favorably. The big job, then, was to secure at least four additional votes -- most of which would have to be Republican -- while holding those already favorably disposed toward F. E. P.¹⁸

The Urban League did not rely on the "public and flamboyant" aspect of the program to sway these votes. As Berry said: "Something else was going on quietly and behind the facade of articulation and public demonstration." Members of the League's board worked to bring personal and organizational influence to bear on Republican senators.

The agency claimed major credit for two rather significant developments resulting from this tactic. By mid-April the Chicago Association of Commerce and Industry had passed a resolution endorsing F. E. P. legislation in principle, and the Association's staff was instructed to frame recommendations for amending the bill then before the senate. Urban League board member Frank H. Cassell of Inland Steel was credited with spearheading the procedure which led to the Association's unprecedented resolution. He was backed by other League board members and other sympathetic Association members from various Chicago firms.¹⁹

Urban League officials also felt that they had been instrumental in helping to transform F. E. P. into a bipartisan issue. For years F. E. P. in Illinois had been considered a Democratic measure. Consequently, it always passed the house, usually controlled by Democrats, and was always killed in the Republican-controlled senate. In 1961 there were indications that some Republicans were beginning to accept F. E. P., at least in principle. Symbolic of this changing opinion was a "surprise appearance" before the senate by Charles Percy to testify in favor of F. E. P. legislation. League board members had conferred with Percy and other Republican leaders, and they claimed credit for helping persuade him to testify.²⁰

After the bill had been enacted into law, signed by the governor, and a commission appointed to administer it, the League's executive director summed up the Urban League's view of its contribution to the successful campaign. Berry exclaimed:

It was a great victory -- a bipartisan victory, with the Urban League working with and on all sides of the battle without agency identification with either political party

-- without lobbying, but always recognizing, stimulating and complimenting the contributions of all individuals and groups willing to help.²¹

The F. E. P. law, coming during a period of changing national sentiment, eventually had a great impact on the League's work in employment and guidance. After 1956 the Chicago League abandoned its attempt to operate a mass placement office and concentrated its efforts on trying to break patterns of discrimination. Dramatic accomplishments were few in the 1950's. By 1963, however, the impact of the civil rights movement, of Executive Orders by Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson and of the Illinois F. E. P. statute began to open opportunities to Negroes with the requisite skills and training. In fact, requests for well-trained Negroes came faster than qualified people could be found. "The young, well-trained Negro," Berry wrote in 1964, "now has a chance to get into the mainstream of American economic life." The League's employment and guidance staff members were having trouble meeting the demands made on them.

They are under pressure to provide the "instant Negro." The employer names the job specifications for which he wants a Negro and we are supposed to produce one to fill the spot with the same magic as producing a genii out of a bottle.²²

With so many businesses searching for talented "token Negroes" to show Federal officials that their firms did not discriminate, comedian Dick Gregory wondered if the well-known automobile rental company might not soon open a "Hertz-Rent-a-Negro" agency.

The humor of the situation was rather sardonic, for Negroes still comprised the largest percentage of the unemployed and still overloaded the welfare rolls. Yet it was encouraging to see more talented Negroes finally getting jobs commensurate with their training and abilities. But what about the unskilled, the inadequately trained and the Negro with only average talents? While the Urban League was helping push the talented through the opening gates of opportunity, it also needed to be concerned about those who could not even reach the threshold.

In late 1962, the League began an experimental job-training program to aid unskilled welfare recipients.²³ The special job training project began as a cooperative venture with the Yellow Cab Company and the Cook County Department of Public Aid. A short training course was established to train welfare recipients as taxi cab drivers. Those who completed the course were employed by the Yellow Cab Company. These men became self-supporting and thus were removed from the welfare rolls.²⁴ A similar project was begun with the Shell Oil Company to train gas station attendants. By June, 1964, the Yellow Cab Company and Shell Oil Company had hired 1,270 men off the relief rolls.²⁵

The first major call for Urban League assistance in implementing a fair employment program came from Chicago banks. In August, 1963, James Baxter, a First National Bank of Chicago vice president, arranged for Berry and two staff members to meet with the bank's personnel officials. These bank officers said that they wanted to open all jobs "from the beginning to management trainees" and asked the League to find qualified people to fill the openings.²⁶ Shortly after the conference at the First National Bank, five large commercial banks asked the League to screen applicants for them. During 1963 other firms called for assistance in implementing equal job opportunities programs, and the Association of Commerce and Industry began to encourage its members to institute such programs.

Several of the firms seeking Negro employees realized that the League could not supply "instant Negroes." The president of the Harris Trust Company, for example, asked the Urban League staff to assist with the firm's "pre-training program" for bank employees. Harris Trust planned to place promising young people in this training program, pay them a small stipend while in training and assure them a job upon successful completion of the course.²⁷

In the general field of community services, the principal areas of League concern were housing, racial violence and the schools. It had been recognized for some time that discrimination in housing was a key barrier to integration in other areas. Moreover, much of Chicago's racial violence over the years had its roots in housing segregation. Given the significance of housing, it would seem that discrimination in this area would have been a major target of Negro protest. Housing, however, became a subordinate issue to employment and schools in the 1960's.

There were probably several reasons for this. In the first place, white resistance remained strongest against efforts to integrate neighborhoods. Real estate interests and other influential groups with vested interest in a dual housing market threw their considerable weight against integration. Another factor was the divided sentiment within the Negro community. James Wilson reported Negro politicians, for example, reluctant to embrace open occupancy. The dispersal of the Negro population would destroy their source of political strength.²⁸ In addition, integrated housing, as opposed to better housing, had come to be considered as largely a middle-class goal. The Chicago Commission on Human Relations concluded from a 1963 survey of states with fair housing laws that "the demand to own, rent, lease, or co-op by Negroes outside established neighborhoods comes chiefly from middle-income families."²⁹

This does not mean that discrimination in housing was not an important area of protest. The Chicago Urban League, however, devoted a comparatively minor proportion of its resources to this problem. But in many respects, the agency's fair housing program was a replica in miniature of

its fair employment activities. The board of directors made a formal program possible by adopting a housing policy statement in early 1960. Nevertheless, some board members seemed somewhat reticent for the agency to become too closely identified with this issue.³⁰

Even so, the League's housing activities were rather varied. During each legislative session, a staff member testified in favor of fair housing legislation. Urban League testimony, citing statistics, usually emphasized the causes of segregation and its baneful social and economic consequences.³¹ Beginning in 1960 the League worked through the United Citizens' Committee for Freedom of Residence (FOR) to get an open occupancy bill through the legislature. By 1965 the fair housing campaign was gaining momentum, and the League was an active participant. It was hoped that this would be the year that an open occupancy bill would be enacted into law. In spite of the more intensive campaign, culminating in a demonstration on the steps of the capitol in Springfield, the General Assembly failed to pass a fair housing law.

Between 1960 and the summer of 1965, League efforts to reduce racial violence were supplementary to the work of many other public and private agencies. The Urban League's program concentrated mainly on working for effective police action and on arousing the public to an awareness of the potential danger. The League's Council of Religious Leaders was active in both of these areas. Composed of seventy ministers, priests and rabbis in 1960, the Council almost doubled in membership by 1965. Council members exhorted the members of their congregations to work to relieve tensions; and where violence broke out or threatened to break out, they went in to work with the people of the areas involved and to act as observers of police practices. These activities heralded the increasing participation of religious leaders, as individuals and as members of organized groups, in the campaign for improved race relations in the city.

The Urban League also helped to break through the newspaper curtain thrown around incidents of racial violence. Immediately after the race riot of 1919, the press adopted a policy of not publicizing incidents of racial violence. It was felt that the absence of publicity would keep small disturbances from spreading and from inciting more generalized rioting. Radio and television embraced this policy and helped to maintain the "barrier of silence." Ordinarily, this seemed to be a sound policy, but as tensions increased, League officials felt that public opinion should be brought to bear as a deterrent to perpetrators of mob violence. With the mass media silent, however, the general public, League officials maintained, was probably unaware of the prevalence of racial incidents and of how great the potential was for large-scale conflict.

As a means of alerting the public to the danger, Hugo B. Law -- an advertising executive and Urban League vice president -- and Edwin Berry proposed that the League sponsor a newspaper advertisement. The League

board endorsed the project in July, 1961. The success of the plan depended upon the League's ability to involve the major religious organizations and to solicit "various leaders in all levels of the community" as signators.³² Representatives of several religious groups endorsed and supported the project. These included officers or staff members from the Church Federation of Greater Chicago, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the Catholic Interracial Council, the Chicago Board of Rabbis and the Department of Christian Social Relations of the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago.

When the advertisement, entitled a "Chicago Declaration of Democracy," appeared, it was signed by 404 "prominent Chicagoans."³³ In assessing the effects of the project, Berry reported: "The drama of the ad attracted so much attention and was written on so widely, and interracial violence was so sharply reduced that the agreement of silence regarding news on violence was broken and I believe shall not be reinstated in Chicago."³⁴

During the school year 1961-1962, school problems began to overshadow other race relations issues. The prolonged controversy over conditions in Chicago schools was much too complex to be detailed here. Urban League involvement in the early stages of this struggle, however, was quite significant, and as the conflict continued, it became necessary for the League to define rather clearly its relationship to the activist civil rights organizations.

For decades Chicago had operated double shifts in some schools. This practice began during the depression, and afterwards the city was not able to build facilities fast enough to house its rapidly growing school population. Between 1930 and 1940, however, few Negroes were affected by the double shift arrangement. But during the next two decades, double shift schools soon became characteristic of Negro areas. By 1961 nearly all schools on split shifts served Negro neighborhoods.³⁵ Furthermore, there was little doubt that schools in Negro areas were attended almost exclusively by Negro children, and schools in white neighborhoods were attended by white children. Although some schools were considered integrated, a decreasing percentage of Chicago children attended such schools, and many so-called integrated schools were actually becoming segregated, or -- to use the common euphemism -- were in transition from predominantly white to predominantly Negro

The fact that segregation existed, as Negro organizations were contending with increasing vigor, was shown by the Board of Education's racial headcount in October, 1963, and confirmed by the Advisory Panel on Integration of the Public Schools, the Hauser Panel, under the chairmanship of Philip M. Hauser of the University of Chicago. The Panel's report stated bluntly: "Negro children and teachers and other staff in the Chicago Public School System are, by and large, concentrated in predominantly Negro areas in the city."³⁶ The Hauser Panel denied, however, that this segre-

gation resulted from "intent or design" on the part of the Board of Education. Rather, it was a "by-product of segregated patterns of settlement and housing," which was, in turn, a "product of forces built deep into the social, economic, and political fabric of the nation."³⁷

The creation of the Hauser Panel and the approval in principle of its findings and recommendations by the Board of Education was, perhaps, the only major concession made to the civil rights movement. And this was only a very small first step, which had come after two years of protest and would be followed by more. Between 1962 and 1965 those seeking to integrate the schools used litigation, sit-ins, marches, city-wide boycotts and appeals to the federal government to achieve their end. A multiplicity of organizations have been involved, and the activities of first one then another have come to the fore.

The Chicago Urban League made its most significant contribution during the early stages of the controversy. The League was instrumental in bringing the schools issue to the fore by helping to foment unrest in the Negro community over the quality of education offered in the schools. For some time, the agency had been directing its research toward exploring and publicizing conditions in the schools. Materials gathered by the research department were used, from time to time, in presenting testimony at Board of Education hearings and for public education activities. Principal stimulation for the protest movement came, however, in September, 1961, when a group of Negro parents filed suit in the United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois against the Chicago Board of Education and the general superintendent of schools. The plaintiffs in Webb v. The Board of Education charged that a deliberate policy of segregation was followed by school officials in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment and asked for injunctive relief for themselves and others similarly situated. The court dismissed the case in 1962, on the grounds that state remedies had not been exhausted, but soon various organizations were launching militant campaigns for school integration.³⁸

One of the first demands of these groups was that the Board of Education end double shifts in Negro schools by transferring Negro children to white schools with unused space. Since the general superintendent's office no longer made official reports on vacant space, it was difficult to get reliable information on space use. Different organizations made estimates of available space in white schools ranging from 25,000 to 75,000 seats. At the beginning of the 1961-1962 school year, several Negro parents tried to enroll their children at schools which reportedly had vacant seats.³⁹

In the meantime, Urban League investigators were at work. On December 12, 1961, Mrs. Olivia Filerman reported to the League's board of directors that the research department had made disturbing findings on classroom utilization, and these findings were disclosed in a report to be released on that day. Urban League research had shown 382 classrooms

not reported by Superintendent Benjamin Willis as being vacant. Consequently, unused rooms were "available for use by Negro students on double-shift and in overcrowded classrooms." "These rooms," Mrs. Filerman asserted, "could be used to completely eliminate double shifts tomorrow, if the school board decided to put them to this use." Moreover, many schools with vacant classrooms were found to be within walking distance of Negro students on double shifts.⁴⁰

The Urban League's report provided documented information for the growing number of parents and organizations evincing a determination to press for changes in the schools. Since the League's study was the result of careful research, done by a reputable organization and based on available Board of Education figures, it could not be ignored by school officials. The report provoked a year-long controversy over school space use. During this period, according to the investigator for the United States Civil Rights Commission, "the public was treated to a statistical display of prodigious and bewildering proportions." The general superintendent issued replies to the League's study on December 18, 1961, and on January 10, 1962. Both statements were unconvincing to school critics. Berry summed up the status of the controversy in mid-January, when he reported to the League's board of directors that:

Mr. Willis plays a "numbers game" -- since September he has stated at different times that there are the following number of vacant or available classrooms: 1 - 14 - 143 - 198 -- last, Oscar Shabat, Schools Director of Human Relations came up with the figure of 200.

In various reports the Superintendent changes figures, definitions and usage -- sometimes he talks of available classrooms, sometimes number of seats -- sometimes total classrooms and other times regular classrooms, *et al.* No one has gotten this information accurately reported and in a standard way -- not even his employers, the School Board.⁴¹

Neither the Board of Education nor the general superintendent made any efforts of consequence toward meeting the demand for better space utilization, and the civil rights organizations turned to more aggressive methods of dramatizing Negro grievances.

The growing militance of the civil rights movement in Chicago placed the Urban League in something of a dilemma. It could not actively participate in direct action demonstrations, for of all the major organizations participating in the school protest movement, the League was most susceptible to pressures from defenders of the status quo. With the greater portion of the agency's budget coming from the Community Fund and business and industrial groups, a threat to withdraw support had usually been sufficient to hold the League in line. Conservative criticism of the Urban League's

role in the schools controversy caused the Community Fund to call the agency to task in 1962, but with the changed climate of opinion which prevailed on race relations in the 1960's, the League could not be forced to make drastic changes in its programs as concessions to conservative demands.⁴² These groups were unwilling to exert enough pressure to force such changes. They did not want their criticisms of the Urban League to be interpreted as opposition to the Negro's valid aspirations, and they still considered the League relatively "safe and sane." For in spite of its new militancy, it was still several steps behind the direct action organizations.

Although the Urban League could not afford to ignore the opinions of its business and industrial constituency, it also had to be concerned about its relations with the direct action organizations. These groups were expressing the dominant Negro mood, and not to be identified with them would place the League outside of the civil rights movement. Furthermore, since the Urban League could not adopt activist tactics, in order to serve the civil rights movement in areas where it considered itself uniquely competent, the League had to be accepted by the direct action groups. In most cities with Urban League branches such a working relationship could not be established. The activists usually dismissed Urban Leagues as "Uncle Tom" organizations catering to the demands of the "power structure."⁴³

The Chicago branch, however, was in a more favorable position. The militant image being projected by 1960 enabled it to establish a working relationship with the direct action organizations during the early stages of the Chicago protest movement. Following the release of the school space study report, Urban League representatives joined with representatives from CORE and the NAACP, in December, 1961, to testify at the Board of Education's budget hearing. All three groups demanded a moratorium on new school construction until vacant space had been utilized.⁴⁴ Then, in 1962, the League and the NAACP called together representatives of civil rights organizations and community organizations to present a united front in seeking the nomination of school board members who would be sympathetic to Negro aspirations. By 1963 this informal group had become formally federated as the Coordinating Council of Community Organizations (CCCO). The CCCO included in its membership organizations of varying degrees of militancy, ranging from the rather conservative Chicago Urban League and NAACP to much more militant groups like The Woodlawn Organization, CORE and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. Nevertheless, the League openly boasted of its role in founding the Coordinating Council.⁴⁵

But, as the civil rights organizations turned more and more to direct action and the CCCO assumed a prominent role in leading these projects, the League had to define its role clearly. This was as much an internal as an external matter. Many Urban League board members had to be convinced that associating with the direct action groups would not result in the

abandonment of the traditional Urban League methods -- research, education and negotiation. Berry tried to allay any fears among board members. He continually emphasized the importance and the necessity for non-violent demonstrations, but he assured them that the League would not become a direct participant. He envisioned the agency's relationship to the direct action groups as similar to that with business and industrial organizations.⁴⁶ "As the revolution proceeds," Berry told his board in late 1963,

there will be even greater need for [the] Urban League with its crackerjack research department, its know-how in community organization and negotiation, to provide the intelligence to the civil rights movements and the intelligence of the bi-racial process. As the revolution proceeds, the Urban League will be needed more and more to provide its know-how to the groups who understand how to demonstrate -- not how to negotiate.

Urban League abilities will be needed to interpret clearly the goals and aspiration -- to spell out problems and progress to help business and government leaders understand the legitimate aims and goals of CORE and SNICK; and to help CORE and SNICK understand the problems of the conventional power structure.⁴⁷

There is no evidence that the direct action groups have been willing to concede the degree of dependence on the Urban League indicated in this statement. Nevertheless, throughout the years 1961 to 1965, the Chicago Urban League has maintained the respect and confidence of the more aggressive groups. At the same time, it has attracted and held the support and goodwill of business and industrial interests. This was no small achievement.

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Footnotes:

¹ This paper is based on chapters IX and X of the author's forthcoming book, A History of the Chicago Urban League (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966).

² Whitney M. Young and Henry Steeger, New York, to Arthur Kruse, July 24, 1962. Unless another source is indicated, all letters, memoranda and other manuscript materials cited are from the files of the Chicago Urban League.

³ For an extended treatment of this controversy see Arvarh E. Strickland, "The Chicago Urban League, 1915-1956" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1962), 180-203.

⁴ Ibid., 204-256.

⁵ Chicago Daily Defender, September 10, 1957.

⁶ Minutes of the Board of Directors of the Chicago Urban League, October 16, 1957 (cited hereafter as "Minutes").

⁷ Statement by N. O. Calloway, 3rd draft, September 25, 1957.

⁸ (New York, 1964), 1-2.

⁹ Minutes, September 17, 1963.

¹⁰ Resolution Regarding Equal Job Opportunity, approved by Board of Directors, Chicago Urban League, December 13, 1960.

¹¹ Executive Director's Report to the Chicago Urban League Board of Directors, January 16, 1962.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Chicago Urban League, Leadership Conference for Fair Employment Practices, February 25, 1961 (mimeo. program); Chicago Daily Defender, February 27, 1961.

¹⁴ Chicago Daily Defender, February 28, 1961.

¹⁵ James Q. Wilson, Negro Politics: The Search for Leadership (Glencoe, Ill., 1960), 161-163.

¹⁶ Ibid., 163.

¹⁷ Minutes, February 21, 1961.

¹⁸ Illinois Committee for Fair Employment Practices, The FEPC Story in Illinois with Voting Records, February 25, 1961 (copy in program for Chicago Urban League Leadership Conference for Fair Employment Practices).

¹⁹ See Executive Director's Report, January 16, 1962; Minutes, April 18 and May 16, 1961.

²⁰ Minutes, April 18, 1961.

²¹ Executive Director's Report, January 16, 1962.

²² Edwin C. Berry, "The Menace of Unemployment: Jobs, Poverty and Race," Negro Digest, XIII (September, 1964), 7-8.

²³ Minutes, November 20, 1962.

²⁴ Ibid.; Executive Director's Quarterly Report to the Chicago Urban League Board of Directors, March 19, 1963.

²⁵ Minutes, May 21, 1963, and June 16, 1964.

²⁶ Minutes, August 20, 1963.

²⁷ Minutes, September 17, 1963.

²⁸ Wilson, Negro Politics, 202-205.

²⁹ Chicago Commission on Human Relations, A Report to the Mayor and the City Council of Chicago on the Present Status and Effectiveness of Existing Fair Housing Practices Legislation in the United States as of April 1, 1963 (Chicago: City of Chicago, 1963), 4.

³⁰ Minutes, January 19 and February 9, 1960.

³¹ See, for example, Chicago Urban League, "Testimony of the Chicago Urban League to the House Executive Committee 72nd General Assembly, State of Illinois in Behalf of HB 171, the Fair Housing Act of 1961,"

March 15, 1961 (mimeo), and Chicago Urban League, "Testimony . . . Before the Senate Committee on Licensing and Miscellany on House Bill 257," May, 1965 (mimeo).

³² Minutes, July 18, 1961.

³³ Minutes, August 15, 1961.

³⁴ Executive Director's Report, January 16, 1962.

³⁵ See U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, Civil Rights U.S.A. : Public Schools, Cities in the North and West (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1962), 223.

³⁶ Advisory Panel on Integration of the Public Schools, Report to the Board of Education City of Chicago (Chicago: Board of Education of the City of Chicago, March 31, 1964), 3.

³⁷ Ibid., 4.

³⁸ U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, Civil Rights U.S.A., 209-211.

³⁹ See, for example, Chicago Sun-Times, October 10, 1961.

⁴⁰ Minutes, December 12, 1961.

⁴¹ Executive Director's Report, January 16, 1962.

⁴² The 1962 controversy with the Community Fund is treated in Strickland, "A History of the Chicago Urban League," Chapter X.

⁴³ Minutes, June 18, 1963.

⁴⁴ Minutes, December 12, 1961; Chicago's American, December 20, 1961.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Chicago Urban League Service Report to the Community Fund of Chicago, Inc., October, 1964, 14-15.

⁴⁶ Minutes, June 18 and August 20, 1963.

⁴⁷ Minutes of the Board of Directors, September 17, 1963. See also Memorandum from Edwin Berry to all staff, October 16, 1963.