

Cincinnati, Ohio, March 7, 1949

Minneapolis, like Cincinnati, is a bustling industrial city. The different tones of factory whistles break into the hub-bub at noon, and people eat their lunches and talk about their homes and cars and kids, what they want, what they hope to do, and how they feel about things. A couple years ago you might have overheard a conversation between friends, one telling the other what had happened to his boy. Maybe his boy was walking home from school in North Minneapolis, and a gang attacked him and called him a dirty Jew. Or maybe they beat him up and left him to crawl home. Or you might have overheard two Negro girls airing their ambitions to sell clothes in a department store, but they couldn't because they weren't white. It was only a couple of years ago that Minneapolis was described as the capital of anti-semitism. Minneapolis was the capital of a lot of ugly 'isms, fed with ignorance and tolerated with apathy.

The story of Minneapolis is a saga of an aroused, a conscience-stricken citizenry. We dared our community to look at the facts. We moved into City Hall in 1945 with an outline of a plan to release our tension and to cultivate in its place an atmosphere of community understanding and cooperation. That was the genesis of the Mayor's Council on Human Relations.

The Council met for the first time, appropriately on Lincoln's Birthday, in 1946. Representatives from schools were there, and from churches, professions, labor, business and other areas of community interest and activity. The Mayor's Council aimed at the elimination of discriminatory practices in Minneapolis; it worked to remove inequalities of opportunity in employment, education, housing, recreation, in law enforcement and in vocational training. We worked with other groups to combat prejudice and untruths, and we undertook a program of education and action. The entire community was enlisted to work democracy into Minneapolis.

Our city needed illumination. Its whole pattern had to be neon-lighted. The lighting came with the Community Self-Survey. And it was a self-survey. Realtors were appointed to a housing committee, and they saw that slums would soon blacken our city if low-cost housing was not undertaken immediately. They--the realtors--recommended that restrictive covenants, gentlemen's agreements if you please--should be publicized and that the realtors should eliminate restrictions on race and religion from their deeds. There was an employment committee that saw the need for a state FEPC law. And it was recommended that all collective-bargaining agreements include

non-discrimination clauses.

A year after the establishment of the Mayor's Council on Human Relations, our City Council passed a municipal FEPC ordinance with enforcement powers. But we didn't have to use those powers. Half of the cases that were handled in the short time since establishment of the Commission were settled by mediation, and the other half had been withdrawn or were pending at the time I left City Hall.

Minneapolis isn't a haven of brotherhood yet, not by far; but we can see the difference. Most of the large firms have printed new employment application forms--minus the insulting questions of race and religion. The Urban League's long campaign to place Negroes behind the selling counters in department stores has been successful, and every large department store has hired Negro clerks.

Once the people of Minneapolis were aroused, they explored and created opportunities for promoting intergroup relations. We had a police training program--a program where the members of the Police Department were given intensive training in intergroup relations. We sponsored a University Institute on "Crisis Points in Human Relations"; we had a series of radio programs on human relations. Last summer, the Conference of Congregational Churches in Minnesota sponsored a project for the placement of Negro and Japanese American children from the Twin Cities in Minnesota farm and lake homes for a two-week vacation period. We posted interpretations of democratic living in the schools, and the railroad stations, the bus terminals and the police stations. We kept brotherhood before everyone's eyes and prayed that it would enter their minds and hearts.

A few weeks ago the Twin Cities Community was given the signal honor of an award from the National Conference of Christians and Jews, an award for outstanding progress in the development of inter-group relations. That award we cherish, for it is symbolic of the light that entered our community when all of us--black and white, yellow and red, Christians and Jews--when all of us saw the stark folly of our apathy.

The story of Minneapolis has yet to unfold. Years of continuous effort lie ahead, years of educational work, organizational work. Tiring work, but richly rewarding.

The same work lies ahead for Cincinnati, and for hundreds of other communities. Poetically-worded laws may be passed in the Congress of the United States, but those laws can be naked illusions unless Cincinnati is behind them, and Minneapolis, and all our communities. We need community

action to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that a national policy of non-discrimination works.

Your city has never been cursed with the epithets to which Minneapolis was vulnerable. Your organizations and your leaders, your leaders of all races, have worked long and hard to keep Cincinnati from shame. The greatest tribute those leaders can receive is support from the entire community, and interest, and effort to the end that every citizen is tendered the respect and the dignity which is his inherent, inviolable right.



# Minnesota Historical Society

Copyright in this digital version belongs to the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, link to, or email content, however, for individual use.

To request permission for commercial or educational use, please contact the Minnesota Historical Society.



[www.mnhs.org](http://www.mnhs.org)