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THE NEGRO IN CHICAGO

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CHICAGO RACE RIOT—BEGINNING OF THE RIOT

WHITES AND NEGROES LEAVING TWENTY NINTH STREET BEACH AFTER THE DROWNING OF
EUGENE WILLIAMS

THE NEGRO IN CHICAGO

A STUDY OF RACE RELATIONS
AND A RACE RIOT

BY
THE CHICAGO COMMISSION ON
RACE RELATIONS



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS
CHICAGO ILLINOIS

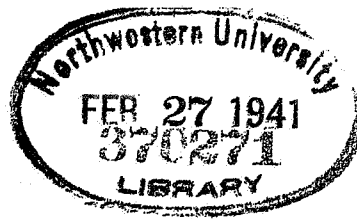


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FOREWORD

There is no domestic problem in America which has given thoughtful men more concern than the problem of the relations between the white and the Negro races. In earlier days the colonization of the Negro, as in Liberia, was put forward as a solution. That idea was abandoned long ago. It is now recognized generally that the two races are here in America to stay.

It is also certain that the problem will not be solved by methods of violence. Every race riot, every instance in which men of either race defy legal authority and take the law into their own hands, but postpones the day when the two races shall live together amicably. The law must be maintained and enforced vigorously and completely before any real progress can be made towards better race relations.

Means must be found, therefore, whereby the two races can live together on terms of amity. This will be possible only if the two races are brought to understand each other better. It is believed that such understanding will result in each having a higher degree of respect for the other, and that such respect will form the basis for greatly improved relations between the races.

The Commission on Race Relations, composed of distinguished representatives of both races, has made the most thorough and complete survey of the race situation that I have seen anywhere. While its field of study was necessarily limited to Chicago, the conditions there may be regarded as fairly typical of conditions in other large cities where there is a large colored population.

The report does not pretend to have discovered any new formula by which all race trouble will disappear. The subject is too complex for any such simple solution. It finds certain facts, however, the mere recognition of which will go a long way towards allaying race feeling. It finds that in that portion of Chicago in which colored persons have lived longest and in the largest numbers relatively there has been the minimum of friction. This is a fact of the first importance. For it tends to show that the presence of Negroes in large numbers in our great cities is not a menace in itself.

There is one recommendation (No. 31) to which I desire to call special attention: that a permanent local commission on race relations be created. When as Governor of Illinois I withdrew troops from Chicago after the riots, I was not at all persuaded that all danger of their recurrence was past. I kept observers from the Adjutant General's office on the ground to watch for any signs of fresh trouble. The Commission on Race Relations was appointed, and conditions at once began to improve. The activities of this Commission, composed of the best representatives of both races, were, as I believe, the principal cause for this improved condition.

Causes of friction, insignificant in themselves, but capable of leading to serious results, were discovered by the Commission and by its suggestion were removed in time to avoid grave consequences. Gross exaggerations of some fancied grievance by either the one race or the other were examined into and were found to rest upon nothing else than idle rumor or prejudice. In the light of truth which the Commission was able to throw upon the subject, these grievances disappeared. In other words, misunderstanding, which had been so prolific a source of trouble between the races, was greatly reduced.

The report contains recommendations, which, if acted upon, will make impossible, in my opinion, a repetition of the appalling tragedy which brought disgrace to Chicago in July of 1919.

Men may differ as to some of the conclusions reached, but all fair-minded men must admit, I think, that the report of the Commission on Race Relations is a most important contribution to this important subject.

FRANK O. LOWDEN

INTRODUCTION

On Sunday, July 27, 1919, there was a clash of white people and Negroes at a bathing-beach in Chicago, which resulted in the drowning of a Negro boy. This led to a race riot in which thirty-eight lives were lost—twenty-three Negroes and fifteen whites—and 537 persons were injured. After three days of mob violence, affecting several sections of the city, the state militia was called out to assist the police in restoring order. It was not until August 6 that danger of further clashes was regarded as past.

To discuss this serious situation and means of preventing its recurrence, a group of eighty-one citizens, representing forty-eight social, civic, commercial, and professional organizations of Chicago, met on August 1, 1919, at the Union League Club. Mr. Charles W. Folds, president of the Club, presided. Brief addresses were made by Mr. H. H. Merrick, president of the Chicago Association of Commerce, Dr. Graham Taylor, Miss Harriet Vittum, Major John S. Bonner, Mr. Charles J. Boyd, and Rev. William C. Covert.

Resolutions were passed and given to the press, and the following letter to the Governor of Illinois was authorized:

*To His Excellency, Frank O. Lowden
Governor of Illinois*

DEAR SIR: A meeting was held today at the Union League Club to take up the matter of the present race riots.

This meeting was attended by 81 representatives of 48 prominent civic, professional and commercial organizations, such as Chicago Medical Association, Chicago Bar Association, Federation of Churches, Association of Commerce, Packing House Industries, Urban League, Woman's City Club, Chicago Woman's Club, Foreign Language Division, representing foreign-born population, etc.

A resolution was adopted unanimously, appointing the undersigned as a committee to wait upon you and ask that you appoint at your earliest convenience an emergency state committee to study the psychological, social and economic causes underlying the conditions resulting in the present race riot and to make such recommendations as will tend to prevent a recurrence of such conditions in the future.

The committee would welcome an opportunity to meet you at any time convenient to yourself and to talk over with you details and give you such information as has been gathered through these various organizations.

Respectfully,

CHARLES W. FOLDS
GRAHAM TAYLOR
WILLIAM C. GRAVES
HARRIET E. VITTUM
T. ARNOLD HILL
FELIX J. STREYCKMANS

In response to this and other urgent requests by various citizens and organizations, and pursuant to his personal knowledge of the situation derived from investigations made by him in Chicago during the period of the riot, Governor Lowden announced on August 20, 1919, the appointment of a Commission on Race Relations, consisting of twelve members, six from each race, as follows—Mr. Bancroft being designated by him as chairman:

Representing the white people: Edgar A. Bancroft, William Scott Bond, Edward Osgood Brown, Harry Eugene Kelly, Victor F. Lawson, Julius Rosenwald.

Representing the Negro people: Robert S. Abbott, George Cleveland Hall, George H. Jackson, Edward H. Morris, Adelbert H. Roberts, Lacey Kirk Williams.¹

In announcing the appointment of this Commission, Governor Lowden made public the following statement:

I have been requested by many citizens and by many civic organizations in Chicago to appoint a Commission to study and report upon the broad question of the relations between the two races. These riots were the work of the worst element of both races. They did not represent the great overwhelming majority of either race. The two are here and will remain here. The great majority of each realizes the necessity of their living upon terms of cordial good will and respect, each for the other. That condition must be brought about.

To say that we cannot solve this problem is to confess the failure of self-government. I offer no solution of the problem. I do know, however, that the question cannot be answered by mob violence. I do know that every time men, white or colored, take the law into their own hands, instead of helping they only postpone the settlement of the question. When we admit the existence of a problem and courageously face it, we have gone half-way toward its solution.

I have with the utmost care, in response to the requests above set forth, appointed a Commission to undertake this great work. I have sought only the most representative men of the two races. I have not even asked them whether they had views as to how the question could be met. I have asked them only to approach the difficult subject with an open mind, and in a spirit of fairness and justice to all. This is a tribunal that has been constituted to get the facts and interpret them and to find a way out. I believe that great good can come out of the work of this Commission.

I ask that our people, white and colored, give their fullest co-operation to the Commission. I ask, too, as I have a right to ask, that both races exercise that patience and self-restraint which are indispensable to self-government while we are working out this problem.

During an absence of the chairman, due to ill health, Governor Lowden requested Dr. Francis W. Shepardson, director of the State Department of Registration and Education, to serve as acting chairman. On Mr. Bancroft's return and at the Commission's request, the Governor appointed Dr. Shepardson a member and vice-chairman of the Commission.

¹ For biographical data see p. 652.

The Commission's first meeting was held on October 9, 1919. Nine other meetings were held during the remainder of that year to canvass the possible fields of inquiry, and to provide for the organization of studies and investigations.

The Commission was seriously handicapped at the outset by a complete lack of funds. The legislative session of 1919 had ended before the riot, and the next regular session was not to convene until January, 1921. The Commission felt that it could not with propriety seek to raise funds on its own appeal. To meet this situation a group of citizens offered to serve as a co-operating committee to finance the Commission's inquiry and the preparation and publication of its report. This Committee, consisting of Messrs. James B. Forgan, chairman, Abel Davis, treasurer, Arthur Meeker, John J. Mitchell, and John G. Shedd, gave effective aid, being most actively assisted by Messrs. R. B. Beach and John F. Bowman, of the staff of the Chicago Association of Commerce. Without the co-operation of these gentlemen and the resulting financial assistance of many generous contributors the Commission could not have carried on its work. It here expresses its most grateful appreciation.

The Commission organized its staff, inviting Mr. Graham Romeyn Taylor, as executive secretary, and Mr. Charles S. Johnson, as associate executive secretary, to assume charge of the inquiries and investigations under its direction. They began their work on December 7, 1919.

While the Commission recognized the importance of studying the facts of the riot, it felt that even greater emphasis should be placed on the study and interpretation of the conditions of Negro life in Chicago and of the relations between the two races. Therefore, after a brief survey of the data already collected and of the broad field for its inquiries, it organized into six committees, as follows: Committee on Racial Clashes, Committee on Housing, Committee on Industry, Committee on Crime, Committee on Racial Contacts, Committee on Public Opinion.

Along all these lines of inquiry information was sought in two general ways: through a series of conferences or informal hearings, and through research and field work carried on by a staff of trained investigators, white and Negro. Thus both races were represented in the membership of the Commission, in its executive secretaries, and in the field and office staff organized by the executive secretaries.

It is not without significance that in securing office quarters the Commission found several agents of buildings who declined to make a lease when they learned that Negroes as well as whites were among the prospective tenants. They stated their objections as based, not upon their own prejudices, but upon the fear that other tenants would resent the presence of Negroes. Office space at 118 North La Salle Street was leased to the Commission by the L. J. McCormick estate, beginning February 1, 1920. When these offices

were vacated, May 1, 1921, the agents of the estate informed the Commission that no tenant of the building had complained of the presence of Negroes.

By March 1, 1920, the staff of investigators had been organized and was at work. The personnel was recruited as far as possible from social workers of both races whose training and experience had fitted them for intelligent and sympathetic handling of research and field work along the lines mapped out by the Commission.¹

The period of investigations and conferences or informal hearings lasted until November, 1920. The work of compiling material and writing the various sections of the report had begun in October, 1920. Including its business meetings and thirty conferences the Commission held more than seventy-five meetings; forty of these were devoted to the consideration of the text of the report.

The executive secretaries with their staff collected the materials during 1920, and soon after presented the first draft of a report. This was considered and discussed by the Commission in numerous sessions, and the general outlines of the report were decided upon. Then a second draft, in accordance with its directions, was prepared by subjects, and a copy was submitted to each member of the Commission for suggestions and criticisms. Afterward the Commission met and discussed the questions raised by the different members, and determined upon the changes to be made in substance and form. After the entire report had been thus revised, the Commission in many conferences decided what recommendations to make. These recommendations, with a summary of the report, were then prepared, and were reviewed by the Commission after they had been sent to each member. After full consideration they were further revised and then adopted by the Commission. In all these conferences upon the report, all of the Commissioners, with one exception, conferred frequently and agreed unanimously. Mr. Morris, on account of his duties as a member of the Constitutional Convention, did not attend any of these conferences upon the report, summary, or recommendations, and does not concur in them.

The Commission received the cordial assistance of many agencies, organizations, and individuals. The Chicago Urban League placed at its disposal a large amount of material from its files. It also gave a leave of absence to the head of its Department of Research and Investigation, Mr. Charles S. Johnson, the Commission's associate executive secretary. Many citizens, representing widely divergent lines of interest, who were invited to attend conferences held by the Commission, gave most generously of their time and knowledge. The L. J. McCormick estate donated three months' office rent. Messrs. George C. Nimmons & Company, architects, contributed valuable services, including study and supervision by Frederick Jehnck of their office,

¹ The members of this staff, with the previous training and experience of each, are listed in the Appendix, p. 653.

in preparing maps and charts designed to present most effectively data collected by the Commission. The Federal Bureau of the Census made available advanced data from the 1920-21 censuses. Superintendent Peter A. Mortensen and many principals and teachers in the Chicago public schools co-operated in the extensive studies of race relations in the schools; and the Committee of Fifteen provided a report showing important facts in the study of environment and crime. The various park boards, many municipal, county, and state officials, superintendents and others connected with industrial plants, trades-union officers, and leaders in many civic and social agencies greatly facilitated investigations in their respective fields. To all these the Commission returns sincere thanks. But, perhaps, the greatest debt of gratitude is due Mr. Ernest S. Simpson, who generously and devotedly gave his spare time for many months to the editing of this report.

The Commission's letter to Governor Lowden summarizing its work, and his answer follow:

January 1, 1921

Honorable Frank O. Lowden
Governor of Illinois

SIR: Following the race riot in Chicago in July and August, 1919, in which fifteen white people and twenty-three Negroes were killed and very many of both races were injured, you appointed us as a Commission on Race Relations "to study and report upon the broad question of the relations between the two races." We have completed the investigations planned as a basis for this study, and are now preparing a final report of our findings, conclusions and recommendations. This report will soon be ready.

The Commission began its work in October, 1919, and for eleven months has had a staff of investigators assisting it in its activities. While devoting much effort to the study of the Chicago riot as presenting many phases of the race problem, the Commission has placed greater emphasis upon the study of the conditions of life of the Negro group in this community, and of the broad questions of race relations. It therefore organized itself into six committees on the following subjects: Racial Clashes, Housing, Industry, Crime, Racial Contacts, and Public Opinion.

In these fields the Commission's work has been done along two main lines:

(a) a series of conferences, at which persons believed to have special information and experience relating to these subjects have been invited to give the Commission the benefit of their knowledge and opinions;

(b) research and field work by a trained staff of investigators, both white and Negro, to determine as accurately as possible, from first-hand evidence, the actual conditions in the above fields.

The series of conferences, numbering thirty, covered a wide range of topics, such as: the race riot of 1919 as viewed by the police, the militia, the grand jury, and state's attorney; race friction and its remedies; contacts of whites and Negroes in public schools and recreation places; special educational problems of Negro children; Negro housing, its needs, type, and financing, and its difficulties in mixed areas; Negro

labor in relation to employers, fellow-workers, and trade unions; Negro women in industry; the Negro and social agencies; Negro health; Negroes and whites in the courts and in correctional institutions; and the Negro and white press in relation to public opinion on race relations.

Of two hundred and sixty-three persons invited, one hundred and seventy-five attended these conferences and presented their information and views. They represented both races and various groups and viewpoints; they included educators and teachers, real estate men, bankers, managers of industrial plants, housing experts, trades-union leaders, social workers, physicians, park and playground directors, judges, clergymen, superintendents of correctional and other institutions, police, militia, and other public officials, and newspaper editors.

The research and field work done by the staff of investigators covered in general the same broad range. The character is indicated by a bare outline of the work in the six main fields:

Racial Clashes: 1919 Chicago riot, seventeen antecedent clashes; three minor clashes in 1920; brief comparative study of Springfield riot in 1908 and East St. Louis riot in 1917.

Racial Contacts: In schools, transportation lines, parks, and other recreation places; contacts in mixed neighborhoods; adjustment of southern Negro families coming to Chicago; survey of Negro agencies and institutions.

Housing: Negro areas in Chicago and their expansion 1910-1920; 274 family histories showing housing experience, home life, and social back-ground, including families from the South; 159 blocks covered in neighborhood survey; financing Negro housing; depreciation in and near Negro areas; 52 house bombings, 1917-1920.

Industry: Data covering 22,448 Negroes in 192 plants; 101 plants visited; quality of Negro labor; the widening opportunities and chance for promotion studied; special study of trades unions and the Negro worker.

Crime: Police statistics of arrests and convictions of Negroes and selected nationalities compared and analyzed for six years¹; also juvenile court cases; 698 cases (one month) in three police courts studied, including detailed social data on Negro cases; also 249 sex cases (two years) in criminal court; record of eleven penal institutions; environmental survey of Negro areas.

Public Opinion: Files of white and Negro newspapers studied to analyze handling of matters relating to race relations; study of rumor and its effects, and of racial propaganda of white and Negro organizations.

We believe that the large volume of information collected will prove, when properly set forth, of great value not only in Chicago but in other communities where public-spirited citizens are endeavoring to establish right relations between the two races. This end can be attained only through a more intelligent appreciation by both races of the gravity of the problem, and by their earnest efforts toward a better mutual understanding and a more sympathetic co-operation.

Hoping that our appreciation of the trust you have reposed in us may appear in some measure in the aid our report may give toward working out better race relations, we are,

Very respectfully yours,

(Signed by members of the Commission and its Executive Secretaries)

¹ In the final revision of the report, the Commission decided that the police statistics were, as a rule, too unreliable to be made a basis of conclusions.

INTRODUCTION

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STATE OF ILLINOIS
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
SPRINGFIELD

January 3, 1921

MY DEAR MR. BANCROFT:

I have received and read with great interest your letter of January 1st transmitting to me a detailed statement of the work of the Chicago Commission on Race Relations appointed by me after the race riot in Chicago in 1919, which is signed by yourself as chairman and by the other members of the Commission.

I am greatly pleased to know that the Commission has been able to accomplish so much through its investigations and that there has been such hearty co-operation on the part of many citizens to make the inquiry in this important field as valuable as possible.

I shall look forward with more than ordinary interest to the appearance of the completed report in printed form. I suggest that the Commission arrange for its publication as soon as possible in order that your findings and recommendations may be made available to all students of race relations in our country.

I desire to express to you and through you to the members of the Commission my great appreciation of the service which you have rendered to the people of Chicago and of Illinois in connection with the Commission. I have been advised from time to time of your continuing interest, your fidelity in attendance upon the meetings of the Commission, and your earnest desire to render as accurate a judgment as possible.

Yours very sincerely,

(Signed) FRANK O. LOWDEN

HON. EDGAR A. BANCROFT
Chairman, Chicago Commission on Race Relations

In accordance with Governor Lowden's suggestion the Commission herewith presents its report, with findings and recommendations, hoping that it may prove of service in the efforts to bring about better relations between the white and Negro races.

The great body of anti-Negro public opinion, preserved in the literature and traditions of the white race during the long, unhappy progress of the Negro from savagery through slavery to citizenship, has exercised a persistent and powerful effect, both conscious and unconscious, upon the thinking and the behavior of the white group generally. Racial misunderstanding has been fostered by the ignorance and indifference of many white citizens concerning the marvelous industry and courage shown by the Negroes and the success they have achieved in their fifty-nine years of freedom.

The Negro race must develop, as all races have developed, from lower to higher planes of living; and must base its progress upon industry, efficiency, and moral character. Training along these lines and general opportunities for education are the fundamental needs. As the problem is national in its scope and gravity, the solution must be national. And the nation must make sure that the Negro is educated for citizenship.

It is of the first importance that old prejudices against the Negroes, based upon their misfortunes and not on their faults, be supplanted with respect, encouragement, and co-operation, and with a recognition of their heroic struggles for self-improvement and of their worthy achievements as loyal American citizens.

Both races need to understand that their rights and duties are mutual and equal, and that their interests in the common good are identical; that relations of amity are the only protection against race clashes; that these relations cannot be forced, but will come naturally as the leaders of each race develop within their own ranks a realization of the gravity of this problem and a vital interest in its solution, and an attitude of confidence, respect, and friendliness toward the people of the other race.

All our citizens, regardless of color or racial origin, need to be taught by their leaders that there is a common standard of superiority for them all in self-respect, honesty, industry, fairness, forbearance, and above all, in generous helpfulness. There is no help or healing in appraising past responsibilities, or in present apportioning of praise or blame. The past is of value only as it aids in understanding the present; and an understanding of the facts of the problem—a magnanimous understanding by both races—is the first step toward its solution.