Urban League Celebrates Its 25th Anniversary

Baltimore Scene Brighter Since It Began Activities

Successes in Health, Civic, Employment, Educational Fields Cited by Secretary

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Executive Secretary

The Baltimore Urban League, a charter member of the Community Chest and one of the 57 affiliates of the National Urban League, is an interracial organization and a professionally staffed, social agency.

It works to improve the the conditions under which colored people live and work, and to build a better climate of interracial understanding.

In 1924, when the league was organized, there were no colored members of the police force. The city's worst center of disease and blight was a small section in the neighborhood of Druid Hill Ave. and Preston St., known as the "Lung Block."

Skilled Workers Snubbed

With the exception of the Maryland Steel and the Revere Copper and Brass Companies, there were virtually no industries of any size which employed colored workers except as common laborers.

Where they were employed both custom and municipal ordinances required employers to go to the expense of building separate toilet facilities. Vocational training was limited to such traditional occupations as food preparation and tailoring.

Painters, carpenters and other building trades mechanics were barred from union membership. There was no Boy Scout program and very limited opportunities for social workers, nurses and other white collar and professional workers.

League activity during the past 25 years was an important factor in solving most of these problems and in achieving improvement in all of them.

The league's formation resulted from interest aroused by an intensive survey of the status of colored workers in Baltimore industries done by Dr. Charles S. Johnson in 1922. Dr. Johnson, now president of Fisk University, was then director of research for the National Urban League.

He found minority workers excluded from any type of work in 62 of the 175 local industries studied. Reasons were many and frequently mutually contradictory.

Convinced Progress Possible

The Urban League was established out of a growing conviction that an impact could be made on these and other problems in the field of race relations.

It was felt that a group of informed and interested community leaders could be developed to undertake specific projects, and with the help of professional staff, follow through on them in an objective and non-coercive way, relying upon research, conference and public education.

The record of the past 25 years indicates that this conviction was sound. Among the most important of the League's achievements are the following:

1. Clean-up of the "Lung Block," the city's worst area of delinquency and disease;
2. Organization of a successful campaign for the employment of policemen;
3. Elimination of trade union barriers against carpenters and painters;
4. Organization of successful campaign for employment of social workers and nurses by municipal agencies;
5. Initiation of effort to extend the Boy Scout movement; and
6. Integration of skilled and semi-skilled workers into such local industries as Bartlett-Haywood, Western Electric, American Hammered Piston Ring, Bethlehem Fairfield Shipyard, Glen L. Martin, Crown Cork and Seal and Bendix Radio.

Double Emphasis Demanded

The league has a double emphasis in its approach to racial problems in employment, housing, health, education and all areas of community life.

It works with employers, labor unions, agencies of government and others to relax and eliminate racial barriers.

It works also within the colored community and through public and private educational agencies to help make sure applicants for new openings are fully qualified and able to meet established standards.

The earliest roots of the Baltimore Urban League go back to 1919, when the Rev. Peter Ainslie, one of this city's foremost religious leaders and pastor of the Christian Temple, attended the Hague Conference on World Friendship, the first volunteer gathering of representatives from the warring nations after World War I.

One of the recommendations of this conference expressed concern about the problems faced by minority peoples in each of the countries represented.

Inspired by this meeting, the Rev. Mr. Ainslie returned home and organized an Interracial Conference to improve attitudes and conditions in his native city.

When, in 1924, John R. Cary, treasurer of the Provident Savings Bank and others became interested in the League program, the Rev. Mr. Ainslie urged that the work of his conference be merged with the new organization.

Rely Upon Investigations

The league program has always been developed on the basis of periodic investigations and surveys which give factual information about the problems with which it is concerned.

In addition to the Johnson Study of 1922, the league itself has sponsored several other investigations and has supplied research assistance to many other agencies.

In 1934, Dr. Ira De A. Reid did a comprehensive survey under League auspices entitled "The Negro Community of Baltimore," which not only helped to direct Urban League planning, but provided the most comprehensive picture available up to that time on conditions under which this segment of the community lived.

A league study on business in Baltimore in 1930 resulted in the formation of the Association of Colored Businessmen, forerunner of the present Maryland Association for the Promotion of Business.

In 1933 the league again worked with Dr. Charles S. Johnson on a study of college graduates in this city as part of a national study done to evaluate vocational guidance programs for college students.

Field work for a study similar to Dr. Reid's survey, under the auspices of the Council of Social Agencies, and directed by Dr. Warren M. Banner, director of research for the National Urban League, was completed late in 1949.

Provided Housing Data

The League provided considerable data for a series on colored people in Baltimore, carried by a local daily paper in 1942, and for various articles on housing done by Clark S. Hobbs.

In addition, each of the 40 or more projects in which the league has been engaged over the past three years has been preceded by a fact-finding process to determine the nature and extent of the problem and the direction which corrective action should take.

A brief summary of some of the other league accomplishments follow:

LUNG BLOCK In the 12 year period from 1913 to 1924, one block in the neighborhood bound by Pennsylvania and Druid Hill Ave., and Biddle and Preston Sts., was the source for 170 cases of tuberculosis recorded by the City Health Department.

The league made an intensive investigation of conditions covering delinquency, crime, family disorganization and economic problems in that block.

Street Widening Results

Responding to a league recommendation, the mayor authorized the widening of Preston St., and paving the alley inside the block. School authorities proceeded with plans to establish the Preston St. Elementary School in the rehabilitated block.

This construction, plus the playground, resulted in demolition of more than 60 of the houses and has since been described as one of the first slum clearance projects in the country.

VICTORY HOSPITAL—Another of the league's early projects was the effort to reorganize the Victory Hospital. Although unsuccessful, it did provide the basis for the subsequent organization of Provident Hospital, one of the Community Chest agencies.

BOY SCOUTS—The league took a major role in the campaign to extend the Boy Scout program. In its first year of operation it worked to establish and gain official status for Boy Scout Troop No. 400, the first colored troop in the State of Maryland.

In 1936 the league's executive was chairman of a campaign to raise $650 to be applied to the salary of the first colored Scout executive, Andrew R. Johnson.

He went on to organize more colored Boy Scouts in Baltimore than in any other city in the country.

POLICE APPOINTED —Faced with the fact that Baltimore was a one of the few metropolitan cities in the country, North or South, which did not use colored police officers, the league in 1932 developed a comprehensive factual statement on such police officers in 76 of the largest cities in the country.

This provided a factual and comparative basis for the successful campaign in Baltimore.

NURSES—In March 1939, the league, working with the Colored Nurses Association, successfully concluded a two-year campaign to secure their employment in City Hospitals, when Thomas J. S. Waxter, director of the Department of Public Welfare, informed the league that 16 nurses would be added to the tuberculosis unit.

SOCIAL WORK—Prior to the middle 30's, social work agencies of this city employed very few colored staff members, even when serving the colored clients.

Crusaded for Placements

At this time, when social agencies were being expanded to meet the problems created by the depression, the league took an active role in the effort to obtain employment for qualified social workers.

It placed the first six colored ease workers with the Baltimore Emergency Rehabilitation Commission, the first three workers in the Works Progress Administration Business Census, the first two interviewers in the Federal Transient Bureau and the first interviewer with the United States Re-employment Service.

BUILDING TRADES —Significant developments began in 1933 with the league's organization of the Baltimore Building Trades Association, composed of skilled colored building trades mechanics in all fields, whose purpose it was to obtain employment in areas controlled by the all-white unions and in the public housing construction program.

The carpenters were never able to gain admission into Local 101 of the AFL Carpenters Union, even though there are mixed locals throughout the South.

They were successful however in obtaining a charter for a new organization which provided its members with many of the union benefits they could not otherwise have obtained and made possible their employment on Federal construction throughout the public housing, defense and war periods.

The painters, with the guidance and assistance of the league, succeeded in effecting a change in Painter's Union No. 1 late in 1942, so that a number of minority group painters are today members of this union.

No progress was made however in the bricklaying field; and even today that union bars colored members.

INDUSTRIAL EMPLOYMENT —The most important aspect of the league's work in the field of employment has been through contacts with the large industries of this area doing a selling job regarding the abilities of colored workers.

Influenced Hiring of Many

It was a direct result of league effort that the first significant change was made in the employment patterns of local plants during the war period.

The Bartlett-Haywood division of Kopper's Company, late in 1941, employed 75 carefully selected department.

SHIPBUILDING—The Fairfield Shipyard, one of the largest on the East Coast and one of Baltimore's five local yards had scarcely hired any but white workers before 1942 but by June, 1943, had 8,000 of them, constituting approximately 20% of the total force.

The first trainees admitted to the company school for welding and other skilled crafts were selected and referred through the Urban League.

At Maryland Drydock the use of colored workers in new positions stopped; Alexander A. Liveright, War Manpower Commission director, pointed out the need for some degree of preparation when a move of this sort is made.

Subsequently, riveting, welding and other skilled occupations were opened in this yard; and in 1947, the Urban League placed two students from Hampton Institute as Diesel engine trainees with this concern.

HOUSING — During the war period, the league worked closely with local and national housing agencies in the effort to obtain defense and war housing units for workers. It investigated and made recommendations regarding adequate sites.

Private Project Possible

In 1943, the league met with representatives of the Baltimore Housing Authority, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Health Department, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Planning Commission, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Public Improvements, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Law, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Finance, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Education, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Health, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Welfare, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Parks and Recreation, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Public Works, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Public Safety, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Public Utilities, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Public Welfare, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Public Health, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Public Education, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Public Recreation, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Public Transportation, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Public Finance, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Public Law, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Public Planning, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Public Zoning, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Public Assessments, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Public Taxes, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Public Licenses, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Public Permits, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Public Inspections, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Public Complaints, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Public Information, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Public Relations, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Public Publicity, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Public Propaganda, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Public Advertising, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Public Boosting, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Public Boosting, the Housing Division of the Baltimore City Department of Public Boosting