

L O U I S I A N A I N
B R I E F

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RACE RELATIONS - SOME IMPRESSIONS

Louisiana is a truly southern state in its attitude toward race relations. The pattern of daytime segregation and night-time integration is characteristic to this system. Before CORE came to Louisiana, the general attitude of the white community was a paternalistic one. However, now that the Negro in Louisiana is demanding his due, the white population has become fanatically opposed to any form of integration. White authorities, rather than integrating a facility, will close it and deny themselves its use (i.e. the Plaquemine and Baton Rouge swimming pools, the Clinton public library). Various groups such as the KKK, the Citizens Council adhere rigidly to a policy of total segregation.

Louisiana, however, is not a Mississippi. Factors influencing its "liberal" veneer are its mixed (French, Spanish, etc.) population and its contact with the outside world (through trade) both historically and currently. Not far beneath this facade, however, most Louisiana whites are true red-neck bigots like their southern neighbors.

A SHORT HISTORY OF NEGRO VOTING IN LOUISIANA:

From 1724 until 1861, the right to vote was given to free white men only. Louisiana voted in January of 1861 to secede from the Union by only 3, 152 votes in a total of over 37,000 votes. By May 1 of that year Federal troops had occupied the southern part of Louisiana including New Orleans. Negro Federal troops were organized in 1862 under Negro officers and fought with considerable success for the rest of the war. Slavery, however, existed in 13 of the 48 parishes until 1864. The Constitution adopted in that year was the first of Louisiana's Reconstruction acts. It provide for (1) the abolition of slavery; (2) suffrage for Negroes who had seen military service; who owned property, and who showed "intellectual fitness", and (3) equal educational opportunities for whites and Negroes. This Constitution was not universally adopted and it was often ignored by the Union general.

The Republican party (the first group to publically recognize the need for full Negro franchise), meeting in September, 1865, called for the "justice and safety" of universal Negro suffrage, and demanded "liberty and equality for all men". Of the 111 delegates to the meeting, 20 were Negro. However the Democratic party, meeting the same year, stated: "this is a government of white people - People of African descent cannot be considered as U.S. citizens. There can in no event... be any equality."

Negroes voted for the first time on November 6, 1865. However, with Lincoln's untimely death the situation deteriorated. White mob violence, lynchings, and new black codes aimed at restoring Louisiana to ante-bellum conditions. These black codes forbade the Negro population from: (1) selling or bartering personal property; (2) residing in certain towns; (3) entering other towns; or (4) conducting religious services without a permit. These laws and the ensuing violence forced the Federal government to begin a full time military occupation.

At this time congress passed the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments calling for (13th) freedom for all slaves; (14th) state and U.S. Citizenship for all Negroes and equal protection under the laws for all; and (15th) quareanteeing the right to vote regardless of race, color, or condition of previous servitude.

Congress also passed, over President Johnson's veto, the Reconstruction Acts of 1867 which (1) required a seceded state to hold a constitutional convention with delegates elected without regard to race or color; (2) that this constitution must be adopted by a majority of the voters and approved by the Congress and (3) that the state legislatures must adopt the 14th Amendment before the state was allowed to be represented in Congress.

In January of 1868, the Republican Party met to nominate a slate of state officers. The party was split into two factions: the radicals who supported a Negro governor and the white Republicans who wanted a white slate. A compromise was effected and a white man, Warmoth, was nominated, with Negroes nominated for Lieutenant Governor (Oscar J. Dunn) and Treasurer (Antionne Duduclet).

These candidates were elected with the aid of the Negro vote and a new constitution was passed in 1868. This constitution desegregated the schools, adopted the Bill of Rights, rejected a literacy test, and prohibited discrimination in public conveyances and public accommodations. Many Negro candidates were elected to local, state, and federal offices during this period (e.g., three of five New Orleans police Commissioners were Negro).

However this government was maintained only by the intercession of Federal troops and local police. There were two governments in Louisiana from 1866 to 1877. The Democrats used every trick at their disposal to discredit and disrupt the Republican administration. Local white groups (the Klan, the Knights of the White Camelia, and the Innocents) were formed to aid the local white Democratic minority.

Governor Warmoth, trying to placate these white elements, refused to enforce the anti-segregation laws; and on Dec. 7; Lieutenant Governor sine Dunn's death in 1871 became governor. He capably served out the rest of Warmoth's term, though he met with considerable opposition.

In January of 1873 the Republican candidate, Kellogg, a white man, was elected governor, with C.C. Antoine (Negro) as his lieutenant. Democratic opposition increased. On September 14, 1874, the local Knights of the White Camelia fought a battle with Federal troops and local police in New Orleans and for a brief period took over the state capitol.

By 1879, the Democrats with the help of a large Negro vote were strong enough to elect Gov. Nicholls. However, he quickly forgot his campaign promises to respect the rights of the Negro population. The 1877 withdrawal of Federal troops by President

Hayes signaled the end of Reconstruction throughout the South. Although a few Negroes held state offices until 1896, 1877 marks the last date of an enlightened Louisiana. Between 1868 and 1896, Louisiana elected:

two Negro Congressmen (Menard and Nash)
one Negro Senator (pinchback)
32 Negro state senators
95 Negro state representatives

Gov. Nicholls with the Constitution of 1879 instituted White Supremacy. While this Constitution cancelled all other provisions of the 1868 Constitution which were favorable to Negroes, it did not restrict their right to vote.

After the election of 1896, the new governor, Foster, (who had been elected the the Negro vote) called for a new constitution. This constitution established the infamous Grandfather Clause, which immediately cut 125,000 Negroes off the voting rolls (of a total of 130,000). This election also saw the last Negroes elected to state office - three state representatives (Bourgeois - St. Charles; Fauris - St. Tammany; and Casacalvo - East Baton Rouge). (A few Negroes have held Federal positions since then in the South - i.e. Walter Cohen, Comptroller of Customs).

There was no change until 1915 when the United States Supreme Court declared the Grandfather Clause unconstitutional. The state Constitutional Convention then established the Constitutional interpretation test (which had been rejected by the same body as immoral in 1896) as a means of denying the vote to Negroes. This test was not used, however, until 1954 since the all-white Democratic primary kept Negroes from having any say in local politics and discouraged any Negro registration at all. (From 1921 to 1946 Negro registration was never more than 1% of the total. They represented one-third of the population, however.)

In 1944, the lily-white primary was declared unconstitutional. The return of Negro soldiers after World War II and the 1954 school desegregation decision spurred a Negro voting drive.

This intensified Negro voting drive caused a reaction among whites which resulted in the creation of the official State Segregation Commission (now the State Sovereignty Commission) and the semi-official White Citizens Council. Both groups were coordinated by state senator William M Rainach and Attorney William M Shaw. Their policy was to conduct purges of most of the newly registered Negro voters through implementing, dishonestly, the constitutional interpretation tests.

This grossly unfair and overtly prejudicial treatment of Negroes in Louisiana, of course; continues to this day. The Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1959, and 1964, the Justice Department's 21 parish decision, and the Voting Rights Law of 1965, represent the only faint rays of a new sun about to rise.

For additional information, see:

1. The Negro in Louisiana, by Charles B. Rousseve, Xavier University Press, New Orleans 1937
2. U.S. v. Louisiana, (Eastern District of Louisiana, U.S. District Court, Civil Action No. 2548) majority opinion by Judge Minor Wisdom. (Available from the U.S. Attorney's office in New Orleans.)

REGISTRATION AND VOTING:

Registration and voting, while open to all in theory, are still almost exclusively white privileges in Louisiana. The 1963 registration laws are vastly restrictive. Up to this time, minor legal violations or supposed moral deviations are sufficient to disqualify a potential voter.

Unfair administration of the citizenship test, harrassment during registration, and even the closing of the registration books indefinitely are all common methods to keep Negro registration at a minimum in Louisiana.

THE LONGS IN SHORT:

A rather unique aspect of Louisiana's history, the Long "dynasty", which ruled the state for many years, was responsible for molding Louisiana into more than merely a Deep South state, but rather into a medley of bits of gentlemanly "southern heritage", backwoodsness, oligarchical politics, and fair play. The "dynasty" was, in actuality, only two men, though their influence on the state is permanent.

Huey, the first of the Longs, used political corruption to its fullest advantage, played interest groups against each other, and, in short, ran a one-man show. Significantly, Huey was among the first governors to appeal to the poor and the Negro. Like his brother, Earl, it is impossible to determine motives on a question like this; probably neither favored integration nor total eradication of poverty, but both realized the tremendous potential in the unorganized vote of the lowest segments of the population. Both men were anti-organization men, and both opposed, and were opposed by, the moneyed men of New Orleans.

It was Huey who instituted a massive welfare program, unlike anything ever seen anywhere in the South, much of the benefits of which went to Negroes. The feeling is that it was resentment against this assistance to the poor and the Negroes that finally exploded in Huey's assassination.

Earl continued in Huey's path, but with considerably more skill and vigor. "Uncle Earl", as he was fondly called, continued Huey's welfare program and added a school lunch program as well. Perhaps most relevant here were his actions in the civil rights field. Earl, like Huey, was no "nigger lover" but he did more than any other southern governor at that time to accede to Negro demands. The famous story here involves a request by a group of Negroes to have Negro doctors and nurses employed at Charity Hospital in New Orleans. Okay, replied Uncle Earl, but you won't necessarily approve of my methods. Shortly thereafter he visited the hospital and blew up at the hospital administrators for allowing the "flowers of white womanhood" to handle Negro male patients. Administrators, in a frenzy, rapidly pulled all white nurses off the Negro wards and replaced them with Negroes.

Earl knew where his power came from, and it was for this reason that in 1959 he berated the State Legislature for contemplating a purge of Negro voters. Claimed Earl, Negroes were fine people and as equally entitled to the vote as whites. Furthermore, he ranted, how many legislators could prove no negro blood in their ancestry. Pointing his finger and calling names (Rainach among them) he noted that a good many so-called honest men were participating in "sun-down" integration and that several had two families, a white one and a colored one. The attack was too candid for the legislators and as with Huey the opposition finally gained the upper hand: Directly after that speech to the legislature, Earl's wife, Mrs. Blanche Long (now an active figure in McKeithen's government) had him committed to a private mental hospital in Texas. This fact is well known; what is usually not known are the reasons for it.

With his usual tenacity, Earl wormed his way out of the institution and fired all those in his government who had put him in. The strain was great, however; one final political campaign and a political defeat was all Uncle Earl could stand, and he died in 1960.

Earl's defeat (he ran for lieutenant governor in 1960) since Louisiana governors cannot succeed themselves) was significant. It indicated that the opposition - states righters, die-hard segregationists, and wealthy conservatives - had finally united. It has been suggested that Earl's defeat, and this new union of conservative forces, marked Louisiana's modern entrance into Deep South politics. In many senses this is true. Since the Longs depended so heavily on the Negro vote, they did all they could to maintain a good image on that front. The 1960 governor's campaign found the first use of race-hate slogans typical of elections elsewhere and now a part of life here. The anti-Long coalition did Louisiana a disservice and led it backwards into history.

The Davis-Morrison campaign of 1960 set the tone. McKeithen only repeated the Davis slogans: "Fight the Federal power grab....K.O. the Kennedy's....The NAACP is against me.... Time Magazine's Man of the Year, Martin Luther King, is against me....Please help me". It was on this platform that McKeithen was elected. The trend, unfortunately, is just beginning.

While there are individuals that bear the name Long (i.e., Senator Russell Long and Gillis Long, an unsuccessful candidate for governor in 1964); they are not legitimately part of the Long heritage. Rather, they have been won over by the conservative coalition and are now indistinguishable from it.

RECENT FEDERAL ACTION IN LOUISIANA:

It was not until the middle of the late President Kennedy's term that the Justice Department began conscientiously to apply civil rights legislation already several years old. While the Department's activities from 1961 to the present represent the most massive assault to date on Louisiana's discriminatory voter qualification laws, they are still woefully inadequate to overcome the years of white tyranny.

The department began its attack on a parish-by-parish basis; it has now broadened its approach to cover the state as a whole. Its first successful case was U.S. v. Association of Citizens Councils argued in November 1961, and involving Bienville Parish. The Citizens Council had been responsible for a purge of a large number of Negro voters; the court ordered them put back on the rolls, and, in finding a pattern of discrimination in the registrar's office, ordered the registrar to stop discriminating. In the latter order the court meant that if a Negro failed the voter registration test, he could apply to the Federal Circuit Court within ten days and the Court would test his qualifications. In 1962, a similar decision was made for East Carroll Parish the registrar quit and the local federal judge was empowered to process applications. Similar cases were also decided favorably in Madison and Jackson Parishes, although the former is now under appeal. In Washington Parish the Justice Department got two injunctions against the registrar, to stop discriminating and to put purged voters back on the rolls. Suits are now pending in Red River, Webster, St. Helena, East Feliciana and West Feliciana Parishes.

November, 1963 marked the beginning of a new era; a special three-judge panel ruled (2:1) in U.S. v Louisiana that in 21 parishes the constitutional test was being used to discriminate against Negroes and was therefore unconstitutional. The Court further ruled that the 21 registrars would have to submit monthly reports noting all applicants, their race, action taken, and, if rejected, reasons for rejection. Significantly, it was Judge West, arch-enemy of CORE and a Kennedy appointee, who dissented. Now under consideration three-judge panel is U.S. v Louisiana Board of Registration which attacks the use of the LR-1 form (application card) as a test and asks that the Court rule that it can be used to obtain information only.

In early 1965, the first federal suit in this state under the Public Facilities Section of the 1964 Civil Rights Law was filed by the Justice Department against seven restaurants in Bogalusa.

The courts, however, are inherently slow moving. Decisions can be years in coming, and frequently state and parish officials find ways of continuing discriminatory practices despite court order (witness East and West Feliciana Parishes). The Justice Department is hopelessly understaffed and overworked. Moreover, local Federal judges are likely to rule against civil rights groups since they are usually Southerners themselves. Judge E. Gordon West is a classic case; he has stated from the bench that the May 17, 1954 decision is one of the truly regrettable decisions of our times. "

It is evident, therefore, that the courts can, at most, help lay ground work for full equality of all citizens. It is up to us to keep up the pressure that first caused the Justice Department and the courts to act.

POLITICS IN LOUISIANA:

Since Reconstruction, the state has been run by the racist, white-supremist, Democratic Party oligarchy. With the notable exception of the Long dynasty, this power in the hands of the few has led to all sorts of abuse. The oligarchy's means and direction are quite unsophisticated and their campaigns have been based on a racist, hate platform. The last two gubernatorial elections saw two party North Louisiana (Davis and McKeithen) defeat DeLesseps Morrison, a more liberal South Louisiana candidate who refused to use the public's prejudices to gain election. The power structure tends to be wealthy and little concerned with the average poor citizen. The Citizens Councils which interlock with the formal power structure caused the names of few poor whites to be purged along with the names of Negroes from the voting rolls. The power today remains in the hands of the few much as it was in pre-Civil War times.

In last November's election; Louisiana was one of the states Goldwater carried, because of the same factions that put McKeithen and Davis in previous elections. The following map indicates voting by parish in the past federal election:

EDUCATION IN LOUISIANA:

Louisiana's backward educational system of today is the direct descendant and result of the state's extremely inadequate early educational experiences.

With the exception of an integrated school system during Reconstruction, Louisiana had little interest in, and allotted almost no money for, public education until after 1900. Even state publications (Public Education in Louisiana, published by LSU) are forced to admit that the system of slavery had "a significantly retarding effect upon the educational as well as the economic and social development of Louisiana." (With the aforementioned exception of Reconstruction, Louisiana schools have crippled themselves by enforcing a system of segregation.)

Not until 1914 was there an accredited high school in the state, and by 1931 only 114 had been accredited. Louisianians had to wait until 1944 for a twelve grade education system. Of course the situation in Negro schools was far worse. The first Negro high school in West Feliciana, for example, was begun in 1948 and in East Feliciana a formal high school for Negroes was not established until late in 1960 (an unbelievably late date for education in the U. S.). Many accepted necessities of modern education are just being instituted in Louisiana. (Compulsory attendance, for example, is not required, and the state is proud of the fact that slightly less than one-tenth of its teachers have not had a college education.) The median income in 1959 for white teacher (\$4,654.92), a fourfold increase over 1930, was still less than the starting salary for teachers in New York City (approximately \$5,300.) The state's teacher-pupil ratio and percent of state and local revenues spend on education is a low 35th nationally.

It is clear that Louisiana education today is looking forward to a far distant future, a future which has been a long-time reality in most other states.

The system of segregated education, illegally practiced in Louisiana since 1954, clearly denies both races the opportunity for a good education. Recent studies have shown that not only is segregation in schools personally damaging and unlawful, but it also is a retarding factor in the total educational process. A Wall Street Journal report (January 20, 1964) states that students in integrated schools "show substantial gains in scholastic achievement" and that those gains are for "both Negro and white students." "Even the strongly segregationist (white) children... have continued their studies without impairment."

Typical of the effects of a segregated school system are the following statistic: when the national average of years of schools completed for whites was 8.8 years, in Louisiana it was 8.2 (which was below the southern average). For Negroes nationally the average was 5.7, for Louisiana, 3.9 (again considerably below the southern average). Education for both whites and Negroes suffers when there is segregation.

It should be painfully obvious that Louisiana's late starting educational system has been and is totally inadequate. Further, this system will never advance until the schools are desegregated according to the 1954 U. S. Supreme Court decision. Schools are tokenly integrated in a few places (Baton Rouge and New Orleans), but until total integration is effected, Louisiana education is destined to live in the middle ages. To quote a report on school desegregation by more than 20 psychiatrists, "Segregation must inevitably lower the well-being of the community (both white and Negro). A lack of educational and economic opportunities, high disease and death rates. . . are all directly related to segregation."

CORE'S DIRECT ACTION IN LOUISIANA:

Around July 29, 1963, Louisiana CORE Field Secretary Ronnie M. Moore brought a large number of task force workers into Louisiana. Their primary purpose was a VEP (Voter Education Project) program in some of the roughest areas of the state. In the beginning, they concentrated most of their efforts in the 6th Congressional District; later they moved into the 5th District; and 1965 brought expansion to the 4th and 8th Congressional Districts. This is a brief summary of direct action and subsequent arrests in Louisiana:

East Feliciana Parish, 1963: On October 12th and 13th, 26 persons were arrested in the parish seat of Clinton while peacefully picketing the downtown stores. Two months later, twelve Negro adults were arrested for committing public intimidation and conspiring to commit public intimidation after they had written a letter to the town officials requesting the establishment of a bi-racial committee.

From the 3rd to the 8th of December, ten more picketers were arrested for disorderly conduct.

A tri-parish library sit-in was attempted on March 7, 1964; however, the West Feliciana and St. Helena branches were closed that day (due to Talkative Toms and Sallies). All those who sat-in at the Clinton library were arrested.

Tangipahoa Parish: In Hammond, approximately 275 persons, mostly students at the Negro High school, marched to City Hall on Sept. 5, 1963. They attempted to sit-in. The mayor agreed to meet with Negro leaders, and, during that meeting, agreed to establish a bi-racial committee. This was the second bi-racial committee in Louisiana (first in Baton Rouge).

CORE's summer project of 1964 brought much testing of restaurants and voter registration work, but no further direct action or arrests.

Iberville Parish: In Plaquemine, the parish seat, demonstrations began in late August when annexation to the city of two Negro neighborhoods

(one of which is nearly surrounded by the city) and demands for a bi-racial committee were denied. A temporary restraining order issued by the U.S. District Court on September 1 failed to halt demonstrations that night in which over 700 persons were protesting police brutality. 68 persons were arrested, and held in an animal stockade converted to a jail for just this purpose. Tear gas, electric prods, fire hoses, and mounted police were used to drive retreating demonstrators, including six ministers, from a church.

Negro students refused to eat in the school cafeteria in protest over the firing of a lunchroom worker who had participated in the demonstrations.

On September 26, in response to a Negro suit, the federal district judge did not lift, but rather extended a ban against demonstrations through October 10th. On the 7th of October, 400 students attempted to protest the suspension at the school board office, but met road barricades and tear gas. On the 9th of October a tear gas grenade was thrown into a Negro church during a protest meeting. On the 8th of October 40 students was dispersed from a demonstration at their own school with tear gas and two were arrested. Nine students were dispersed from a restaurant sit-in with cattle prods. On the 11th of October individual students were served with copies of the anti-demonstration injunction. On October 21 a schedule civil rights meeting was broken up when arriving participants were met by armed police.

After these events, a "selective buying" campaign was launched, quickly showing success by the forced closing of numerous white-owned stores in the downtown area.

JACKSON PARISH:

Since June 1964, the seat of Jackson Parish has seen unnumerable marches and picket line. During the summer, 15 were arrested for attempting to integrate the town's public swimming pool, and over 40 were arrested for attempting to use the public library (parents were arrested in their homes for "contributing to the delinquency of minors" involved in the test.

The rumored firing of a coach ordent civil rights worker, resulted in a three week boycott of the Negro High school and extensered picketing of down town stores. The students demonstrating outside the school were soon joined by faculty and parents, and the strength of this unity brought Gov. McKeithen to Jonesboro.

WASHINGTON PARISH: Although CORE has been in Bogalusa only since January, 1965, direct action has played a vital role in the program there. Because of the extreme conservatism (800 active Klan members), reaction to CORE has been violent. Marches have been to protest voting procedures, police brutality, employment practices, illegal city ordinances, etc. They have been numerous and dramatic.

From February to May, arrests have been common; since then, they have been almost a daily occurrence (e.g., during the week of May 31, there were 21 single arrests; each bond set at \$100). The great tension in the papermill town culminated on June 2nd with the ambush-shooting of a Negro deputy sheriff.

Even though intimidation and threats of victimization are sufficiently wide-spread, Negroes are continuing their non-violent fight for freedom.