

To the Honorable Robert Montgomery  
Chairman, State Affairs Committee  
House of Representatives  
State of Michigan

Testimony on House Bill No. 318

April 18, 1951

By: George Schermer, Director, City of Detroit, Mayor's Interracial Committee

The Mayor's Interracial Committee of the City of Detroit is an official city agency charged with the responsibility of abating racial tensions and developing interracial understanding and cooperation. While this Committee is but one of the many forces working toward the elimination of racial and other group prejudices and discriminations, it does stand in a central position as an observer and analyzer of conditions and trends. It is from that vantage point that we speak on the matter of fair employment legislation for our state.

During the first two years of its operation the Committee devoted all of its attention to relieving the extreme tension then existing. By the summer of 1946 it became apparent that Detroit had passed the worst part of the interracial crisis. The Committee then attempted to evaluate the situation from a longer range perspective and to draft a program which could serve as a permanent foundation for intergroup peace and cooperation.

The Committee recognized that a primary factor to be dealt with was that of economic opportunity. The facts of economic discriminations and restrictions upon minority groups, especially the Negro group, were everywhere manifest. If the economic restrictions could first be removed, or at least relieved, it would be possible to work out the other problems.

As a part of its long range program the Committee adopted a statement on employment practices which read in part as follows: "The stimulation and encouragement of fair employment practices in every branch of economic activity in the community is one of the most important functions of any program of intergroup

same picture is found at the State employment offices where workers are seeking job referrals and applying for unemployment benefits. It is readily apparent that Negroes are out of work in disproportion to the Negro population.

The question then arises, "If total unemployment has a direct bearing on Negroes greater than is found with white workers, why is this not reflected dramatically in complaints filed with the Fair Employment Practices Commission?" There are several reasons which account for this apparent gap:

1. In periods of high unemployment when only a minimal amount of hiring is being done the Negro worker who is not hired is more apt to attribute his lack of hire to normal personnel rejection rather than racial reasons since he observes that some white applicants are also rejected. However, during periods when considerable hiring is in evidence and the unemployed Negro observes that only Negroes are being rejected, he is more likely to attribute his rejection to race although he may have been discriminated against in both instances. The only difference being that in the latter situation the discrimination is glaring and much more obvious.

2. Where factory and other production jobs are concerned and there are union contracts, many Negroes have by this time obtained sufficient job seniority and are protected by contract provisions. However, in companies which have utilized Negroes only during the past few years and which companies had previously discriminated against Negroes; in times of lay-off the Negroes would naturally be among the first laid off since they would have the least seniority. Instances of this nature have been observed in the Commission's claims experience.