



THE **FREDERICK DOUGLASS** **VOICE**

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Rochester, N. Y., December 20, 1954

Number 26

VOICE WINS VICTORY

City Council Asks State Legislature For Local Housing Authority

Voice Asked For U. S. Housing Authority in 1937 and 1938. Following Survey Tells the Story

FOREWORD

Five years ago, a Negro publication called THE VOICE came into being in Rochester with the idea of uplifting the Negro masses in every phase of community life, while also creating a strong desire for a better understanding between all racial groups and a better appreciation of the Negro and his capabilities. Improved housing for our group was and is Point 7 in THE VOICE platform, found on Page 2 of that publication. It was realized that Rochester, noted for its liberality, was not doing its part by the Negro people in the way of aid to provide comfortable and sanitary homes. THE VOICE found its way by carriers and representatives into from 700 to 800 homes weekly. This means of contact created a mutual interest and stimulated discussion.

Housing became a live subject. Query after query as to what could be done about their plight was ever uppermost in the conversation of the tenants. Many of the houses in which Negroes live were found to be unsafe, unsanitary, overcrowded, without sinks, without bathtubs, with one toilet for several families, or with toilet outdoors or in the cellar, with water in cellars, no furnaces, and generally without the facilities to insure health and cleanliness. It was sel-

dom the tenant's fault for such conditions. We launched a more thorough survey in 1938, when a campaign for BETTER HOUSING was started, initiated by THE VOICE. This survey was made in 1st, 3rd, 7th, 8th, and 11th wards, where the majority of the Negro people live. A study of the character of the homes, location and social conditions was made. The following points were proved definitely by this survey: ONE, that there is an acute shortage in one section, along with bad homes; and TWO, that an overwhelming number of unfit homes were occupied by the Negro people at excessive rents. It was found that a serious problem exists within a minority, low income group, which must eventually affect the majority. The deplorable situation now facing the Negro people in regard to housing is far-reaching. For its amelioration, cooperation of city, state and national government is required, as in the Housing Act of 1938, based on the Wagner-Steagall Law.

City Manager Baker has received a copy of our original survey, of which the following is a revised and abbreviated edition. We are glad to report that the Citizens' Committee on Housing accepted the entire survey for further study.

The Barriers of Discrimination
In keeping with statements of the

foreword, we find that Negro people are faced with a problem quite different from problems of other groups in need of improved housing. It is difficult for Negro people to rent due to prejudice practiced against them indirectly. Invariably he must be reminded of the fact that he isn't wanted in certain parts of the city. Even in the sec-

tions where he now lives, there are numerous houses and apartments he cannot rent, because certain big real estate agencies set the example of refusing to rent to Negroes. Often their houses remain empty for months, even years, if white tenants don't apply.

Artificial Shortage Boosts Rent
Negro residents of the third

ward suffer an acute shortage of decent houses or apartments. Free to move west from Clarissa Street on towards Reynolds and Jefferson, they are prevented from moving east toward Plymouth Ave. And yet on Clarissa St. itself a number of logical houses and apartments are left unrented,—ghosts of the

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**Housing of
Negro Families**

(Continued from Page 1)

slavery-day rule of segregation.

In the Seventh Ward, a great number of ramshackle houses and outmoded aptments are rented to the Negro people that are not fit for human beings at any time. Yet rents of \$2.75, \$4.00, \$5.00, and \$5.50 are charged weekly. We have cases proving that one pretext or another is used to raise rents, when landlords know that Negro tenants must submit due to having nowhere else to move. For instance a Negro woman who had been paying \$3.00 weekly for at least three years for a cottage of three rooms, without either a bath or cellar. A few months ago the landlords demanded \$5.00 rent—saying that with the extra \$2.00 he would make extensive repairs. Though the tenant paid the 66% increase, no sign of the repairs has since been seen!

Unjust Economic Status

No doubt, economic status of the Negro is definitely related to bad housing. The fact is that Negro wage-earners are refused jobs in Rochester factories, hotels, breweries, or on either police, fire or water departments, or in city hospitals or parks, or in hundreds of other places throughout the city. The result is that Negro people are left in the very lowest income brackets, both in depression and in so-called prosperous times. Jobs the Negro can choose from are domestic work, washing cars in a garage, acting as porter... unless he has a business or profession. Since the Negro is not absorbed in industry as others, it is only natural he can't better his housing conditions.

High Death Rates Among Negroes

The yearly death rate among the Negro people is far too high in proportion to the entire population of approximately 3,000. Unsanitary homes, crowded, bandily ventilated—undermine the Negro people's general health. Poverty delays his seeking medical care. Usually sent to Iola Sanitarium for x-rays and further examination, he often finds himself in a state where cure is impossible due to past neglect. Bad housing is a source of most disease.

"A Bad Risk" for Life Insurance

That the Negro is considered "a bad risk" by life insurance companies is seen in the reluctance of some companies to write policies for Negroes. There are many cases to prove this, despite pressure of state laws authorizing insurance for those eligible after undergoing physical tests.

Why is the Negro considered a "bad risk"? This is because of his relegation to mostly menial and heavy work, (if not jobless) under adverse circumstances, with severe exposure in all kinds of weather, and above all because of the fact that he is forced to live in unsafe and unsanitary houses without safeguard from disease and contagion.

Many Realtors Inconsistent

We hear much about his word, "deterioration" of property. For the Negro people there is another meaning which Mr. Webster did not speak of in his explanation. The consensus of opinion arrived at by some landlords, business people and others, is that the moment a Negro family moves into a certain neighborhood where no Negro people are already living, it is felt that the property immediately begins to deteriorate, not from general wear and tear—, but because of the Negro family now established and living in that particular neighborhood.

Such a conclusion regarding deterioration is indeed absurd, simply because of the fact that the

(Continued on Page 3)

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GENESEE STREET

Housing of Negro Families

(Continued from Page 2)

Negro people are also members of the great human family. We also wish to point out that whenever a Negro family has been allowed to move into and live in a so-called exclusive section of the city, they have proved to be congenial, upright, clean, and worthy neighbors and citizens. It is unfortunate that the octopus, color prejudice, must always enter into the picture and even go so far as to deny a humble people the God-given right to dwell in a home of their own.

Housing, an immediate problem

With the conclusion in March, 1938, of the Negro Housing survey conducted by THE VOICE, the news was broadcast in Rochester that both national and state governments are extending their laws for slum clearance, improved and low-rent houses—enforcement of the multiple-dwelling law and for special financial aid to the homeowners and small landlords. Of special interest is the establishment of the United States Housing Authority through the recent Wagner-Steagall Law. Half a billion dollars is now available (with more forthcoming) to replace blighted areas or slum-dwelling with low-rent homes.

THE VOICE supports the plan for a broad survey than its editors were able to make. Such a survey should be carried through speedily so that the peoples' suffering from unsafe and unsanitary housing can be alleviated by making use of the federal government's large-scale, low-rent housing program as specified in the Housing Act of 1938.

THIRD WARD

Survey covered 19 families involving 88 persons:

| | |
|--------------------|----|
| Without bath | 9 |
| Furnaces | 9 |
| Gas | 5 |
| Leak in roofs | 6 |
| Broken sewer pipes | 7 |
| Stoves | 35 |
| Electric | 18 |
| Bad Toilets | 10 |
| Damp Cellar | 18 |
| Lamps | 2 |

One case of a man living in a barn in rear of 151 Adams St.

FIRST WARD

Survey covered 6 apartments involving 13 Persons:

2 public toilets in hall for use by 5 apartments. Only 1 apartment has toilet and bath. One public shower in hall used by 5 persons in 5 apartments. Refuse is placed in cans in hallway. Ventilation—poor in rear apartments.

ELEVENTH WARD

Survey covered 15 families involving 79 persons:

| | |
|---------------------|----|
| Dark Rooms | 4 |
| Without Bath | 6 |
| Stoves | 23 |
| Furnaces | 8 |
| Trap door to cellar | 1 |
| Electric | 10 |
| Leak in ceiling | 5 |
| Leak in roofs | 2 |
| Gas | 6 |
| Lamps | 2 |
| Bad Toilets | 8 |
| Damp cellars | 6 |
| Sewer pipe broken | 1 |
| Outside cellar door | 4 |

A family of six in 6 rooms, no bath; the toilet is in cellar, which is wet and damp. The child had scarlet fever two months ago, another had a defective eye condition.

SEVENTH WARD

Survey covered 62 families involving 192 persons:

| | |
|---------------------|----|
| Dark Rooms | 15 |
| Without baths | 25 |
| Stoves | 77 |
| Furnaces | 12 |
| Trap door to cellar | 1 |

(Continued on Page 4)

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Housing of Negro Families

(Continued from Page 3)

| | |
|------------------------------------|----|
| Gas | 17 |
| Lamps | 7 |
| Cesspool in cellar | 1 |
| Bad Toilets | 15 |
| Damp cellars | 29 |
| Lead in roof | 14 |
| No cellar | 3 |
| Outside cellar doors | 5 |
| Sewer pipes broken | 11 |
| 2 Bath tubs out of order | |
| 2 Toilets in hallway | |
| Servicing 11 1-room apartments | |
| including approximately 15 persons | |

EIGHTH WARD

Survey covered 19 families involving 109 persons:

| | |
|----------------------|----|
| Dark rooms | 4 |
| Without baths | 5 |
| Stoves | 24 |
| Furnaces | 11 |
| Trap doors to cellar | 6 |
| Electric | 13 |
| Gas | 6 |
| Lamps | 5 |
| Bad Toilets | 13 |
| Damp Cellars | 16 |
| Sewer pipe broken | 3 |
| Leak in roofs | 13 |
| Outside cellar doors | 3 |

Three outstanding cases of serious overcrowding from a health and moral standpoint.

1. One family of 9 in 6 rooms, 8 children.
2. One family of 12 in 6 rooms, ten children.
3. One family of 10 in 6 rooms, 8 children. Five boys sleep in one bed. Ages 3, 6, 8, 10, 12.

GENERAL IMPRESSIONS

In going about from house to house interviewing persons in the recent survey made which includes 481 Negro persons, we found them willing and eager to answer questions, show their homes and the conditions under which they are obliged to live. In many cases we found that the houses were unfit to live in. The majority of places surveyed needed major repairs to the stairways, floors and walls, also the plumbing was bad. Many were found without bath tubs and furnaces. The majority of cellars are dirt and are damp from water settling when it rains, which has a tendency to make the entire house damp, a very dangerous situation as it breeds diseases such as tuberculosis.

Several bad cases of overcrowding were found which have been listed in summary. Rats, mice, roaches and bedbugs were found in many homes, even to the large and offensive sewer rats.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the 11th ward where a number of Negroes live in bad houses be included in the areas listed for Housing Study, also from Clarissa St. west to Prospect St.

2. That prevailing laws governing housing be enforced, as making repairs.

3. That discrimination against Negro tenants be abolished.

3. That at least 2 of the 20 Investigators to be picked to make the Housing Study be Negroes.

4. That the Negro be included in whatever kind of project is built here.

5. That since New York City, Buffalo, Syracuse, Utica, Schenectady, Yonkers, Port Jervis and Lackawanna have set up necessary authorities and have petitioned the U. S. Housing Authority for loans that Rochester will follow suit in as soon a time as possible since it has been proven that Rochester does have blighted areas which should be eradicated and that private Realtors and Bankers would not be able to build low-rent houses at any profit.

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