



Smithsonian Institution

National Museum of African American History and Culture

Delegate Magazine 1978

Extracted on Apr-19-2024 02:01:54

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[[7 images]]

successful moves in this area was the "Pilot Placement Program" in which blacks were placed in hitherto closed upper echelon jobs in industry where their successes opened the doors for other blacks. The success of the program led to the first recruitment effort by a major corporation on a black college campus - a process which was to multiply spectacularly. The post-war years also saw the formation, under the guidance of Winthrop Rockefeller, of the NUL's Commerce and Industry Advisory Committee, composed of high ranking officers of major corporations. The Council became the nucleus of business support for the League and an important factor in increasing job opportunities for blacks.

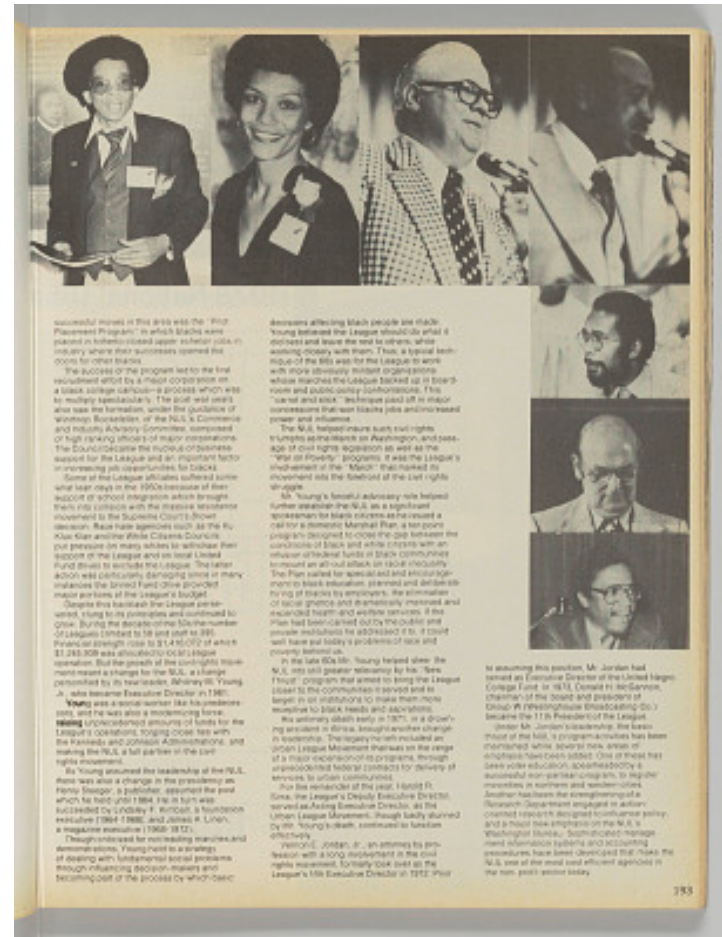
Some of the League affiliates suffered somewhat lean days in the 1950s because of their support of school integration which brought them into collision with the massive resistance movement to the Supreme Court's Brown decision. Race hate agencies such as the Ku Klux Klan and the White Citizens Councils put pressure on many whites to withdraw their support of the League and on local United Fund drivers to exclude the League. The I

atter action was particularly damaging since in many instances the United Fund drive provided major portions of the League's budget. Despite this backlash the League persevered, clung to its principles and continued to grow. During the decade of the 50s the number of Leagues climbed to 58 and staff to 395. Financial strength rose to \$1,416,072 of which \$1,245,939 was allocated to local League operation. But the growth of the civil rights movement meant a change for the NUL, a change personified by its new leader, Whitney M. Young, Jr., who became Executive Director in 1961

Young was a social worker like his predecessors, and he was also a modernizing force, raising unprecedented amounts of funds for the League's operations, forging close ties with the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, and making the NUL a full partner in the civil rights movement.

As Young assumed the leadership of the NUL, there was also a change in the presidency as Henry Steeger, a publisher, assumed the post which he held until 1964. He in turn was succeeded by Lindsley F. Kimball, a foundation executive (1964-1968), and James A. Linen, a magazine executive (1968-1972).

Though criticized for not leading marches and demonstrations, Young held to a strategy of dealing with fundamental social problems through influencing decision-makers and becoming part of the process by which basic decisions affecting black people are made. Young believed the League should do what it did best and leave the rest to others, while working closely with them. Thus, a typical technique of the 60s was for the League to work with more obviously militant organizations whose marches the League backed up in boardroom and public policy confrontations. This "carrot and stick" technique paid off in major concessions that won blacks jobs and increased power and influence. The NUL helped insure such civil rights triumphs as the March on Washington, and passage of civil rights legislation as well as the "War on Poverty" programs. It was the League's involvement in the "March" that marked its movement into the forefront of the civil rights struggle. Mr. Young's forceful advocacy role helped further establish the NUL as a significant spokesman for black citizens as he issued a call for a domestic Marshall Plan, a ten point program designed to close the gap between the conditions of black and white citizens with an infusion of federal funds in black communities to mount an all-out attack on racial inequality. The Plan called for special aid and encouragement to black education, planned and deliberate hiring of black by employers, the elimination of racial ghettos and dramatically improved and expanded



health and welfare services. If the Plan had been carried out by the public and private institutions he addressed it to, it could well have put today's problems of race and poverty behind us.

In the late 60s Mr. Young helped steer the NUL into still greater relevancy by his "New Thrust" program that aimed to bring the League closer to the communities it served and to target in on institutions to make them more receptive to black needs and aspirations.

His untimely death early in 1971, in a drowning accident in Africa, brought another change in leadership. The legacy he left included an Urban League Movement that was on the verge of a major expansion of its programs, through unprecedented federal contracts for delivery of services to urban communities.

For the remainder of the year, Harold R. Sims, the League's Deputy Executive Director, served as Acting Executive Director, as the Urban League Movement, though badly stunned by Mr. Young's death, continued to function effectively.

Vernon E. Jordan, JR., an attorney by profession with a long involvement in the civil rights movement, formally took over as the League's fifth Executive Director in 1972. Prior to assuming this position, Mr. Jordan had served as Executive Director of the United Negro College Fund. In 1973, Donald H. McGannon, chairman of the board and president of Group W (Westinghouse Broadcasting Co.) became the 11th President of the League.

Under Mr. Jordan's leadership, the basic thrust of the NUL's program activities has been maintained while several new areas of emphasis have been added. One of these has been voter education, spearheaded by a successful non-partisan program, to register minorities in northern and western cities. Another has been the strengthening of a Research Department engaged in action oriented research designed to influence policy and a major new emphasis on the NUL's Washington Bureau. Sophisticated management information systems and accounting procedures have been developed that make the NUL one of the most cost efficient agencies in the non-profit sector today.



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